

Parenting Survival Tips

Are you connected with your kids???. Only 27 percent of American adolescents describe their parents as “hands on”. Being hands on or connected means being involved in your child’s daily life; asking about their day and knowing where they like to go, knowing who your kid’s friends are, knowing where your kids are, and how they can be reached. Being consistent with rules and enforcing them helps with being connected to your child. Respect their privacy but also be aware of what is going on in your child’s life.

Communication with teenagers can often be difficult. Teenagers frequently misread emotional signals due to brain development and before you know it, an emotional blow up can occur. To put this in a mathematical equation it would look something like this: misinterpretation + gut response + lousy brakes = poor communication. Have you ever experienced this before? It is quite common. See the communication tips on the back of this page for help.

Talk to your kids about smoking, drinking, drugs, and sex and make sure your kids are clear about your expectations. Set up necessary rules and consequences. Maintain an open dialogue and don’t just talk to them once about the subject.

Maintain rules and enforce consequences if necessary, specifically curfews. Teens with curfews have a greater sense of accountability. They know that parents who wait up will be much more likely to figure out what condition they are in when they come home. In addition, they are more likely to fill you in on where they are going and won’t be out all night doing who knows what.

Some statistics:

- The average adolescent spends almost 40 hours a week in front of the screen (TV, video games, and computer use-this does not include phone time and listening to music). That’s the same amount of time as a full time job! 2 out of 3 teens have a TV in their bedroom and it’s been proven that these kids who use the most media do worse in school than the ones who spend less time on media. The lack of physical activity due to media use is contributing to obesity and diabetes.
- Because violence is so prominent in mass media, the average youngster will witness 200,000 acts of violence before he or she graduates from high school including 20,000 murders. TV violence or violent video games can increase aggression hormones in teens.
- Our teen pregnancy rate is almost double that of the Westernized countries with the next highest, England.
- The US has the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases, like syphilis, gonorrhea, and Chlamydia, in the Western Industrialized world. Three million US teens contract an STD every year. The countries with low rates of teen pregnancy and low rates of STDs deal with sex more openly. In the mid-1990s a study showed that 75% of adolescent boys and 57% of adolescent girls had oral sex before intercourse. STDs can be contracted from oral sex. Most teens do not consider oral sex as sex even though STDs can be contracted.
- Unfortunately only 19% of teens get accurate information on sex from their families. With the increasing restrictions on sex education in schools, many of the other 81% rely on flawed info from their peers or the media. 75% of teens say that media portrayals of sexual behavior influence their sexual behavior and their peers’.

News Flash:

- Teens already have sex on the mind. It doesn’t matter where they come from, what their beliefs are, or how they were raised: adolescents have natural processes at work in their brains and bodies that prompt an interest in sex. Talking about it will not *make* them interested. They are *already* interested.

See the next page for a quick reference of do’s and don’ts

Do:

- Listen, listen, listen. Don't just talk at them, be open to listening to their point of view.
- Be open to discussing values, even when your teens question yours or disagree. That challenging means that they are starting to think for themselves, not that they are rejecting everything you think is important.
- Talk about peer pressure and how to manage it. Encourage your teen to make independent decisions and discuss them with you.
- Search for ways to connect with your teenager and spend time together as a family.
- Maintain family traditions even when teens complain about them.
- Insist that your teen share in family chores and responsibilities.
- Let your teens know that scientists have discovered they need at least 9 ½ hours of sleep every night and let them catch up on some sleep on the weekends.
- Say clearly what you are feeling to reduce misinterpretations.
- Model good, clear communication skills, do not be condescending.
- Expect and tolerate a little adolescent "mouthiness".
- Apologize to your child if you need to.
- Call a time out if communication is badly off track.
- Pay attention to your son's and daughter's school performance and intervene early if you see him or her starting to turn off.
- Encourage your child to get involved in a wide range of activities.
- Encourage your child to find solutions when they are feeling down or discouraged and name and talk about feelings. Ask them what they can do about a situation that is bothering them.
- Get to know your child's friends and their parents.
- Emphasize the importance of respect and honesty in all relationships, romantic relationships included.
- Have regular conversations with your child about values you consider important in romantic relationships and sex and sexuality.
- Make sure your child has accurate info about drugs, alcohol, and STD's.
- Model responsible use of alcohol. Our actions related to alcohol, tobacco, or any other drugs speak much louder than our words
- Set clear expectations about drinking smoking, and using other drugs. Describe the damage that chemical use does to their developing brain.
- Set and enforce curfews.
- Monitor media and TV use. Know what your kids are watching and what games they are playing. Install internet monitoring software and let your teens know that you will be paying attention to how they are using the computer.
- Look for a pattern of symptoms that persists for a matter of months if you are concerned that your son or daughter has a mental health problem.
- If you are at all worried about your child, seek advice from a teacher, counselor, coach, or other adult who knows your son or daughter.
- Seek professional guidance if you are worried about the mental, physical, or emotional well-being of your child.

Don't

- Don't lecture. If lectures worked, you wouldn't need to keep repeating them.
- Don't base your parenting decisions on what every other teen is doing. Decide what you think is best.
- Don't engage toward your child or accept swearing and other abusive language from your child and don't engage in name-calling or put downs.
- Don't get caught up in a yelling match but also don't leave conflicts unresolved.
- Don't get angry or use put-downs about friends or a boyfriend or girlfriend you have concerns about. Your child will defend them. If you have worries, state them calmly and have repeated dialogue.
- Don't ignore signs or accept excuses for repeated drinking, smoking, or drug use.
- Don't send mixed messages about drinking, smoking, or drug use. Tolerating some use, making jokes, or bragging about your own use confuses kids and erodes your credibility.
- Don't tolerate aggressive behavior if it turns destructive to either property or people. Intervene early and let your child know exactly what behavior is accepted and what behavior is out of bounds. Instead of issuing ultimatums, tell your teen what the consequences will be.
- Don't let kids play ultraviolent first-person shooter video games
- Don't let media time crowd out all the other activities that are important for adolescents.
- Don't allow TV, video games, or computers in the bedroom or late at night and turn off during meals-talk with your child instead.
- Don't let your teens get in the habit of using a lot of caffeine or other stimulants to wake up in the morning.
- Don't ignore signs and symptoms of serious mental illness. Just like physical disease, diseases of the brain can strike any family. Don't panic. Tremendous strides have been made in recent years. Adolescents so incapacitated by depression that they could not lift their heads can return to a happy productive life in a matter of months.
- Never give up hope for a mentally ill adolescent.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. Save your relationship capital for the important issues.

- Information taken from:

Why Do They Act That way?: A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen

By David Walsh, Ph.D.

Definitely a recommended read for all parents.