Raising Healthy, Caring and Responsible Teens

What's Happening

Teens are at a stage in their development where they need to create their own identity and begin to separate from their parents. As they become more independent and learn to think for themselves, they spend less time with their families and more time with friends. Though it may not seem like it, teens still need their parents' love, support, and guidance.

What You Might Be Seeing

It is normal when teens:

- Crave independence
- Question rules and authority
- Test limits
- Can be impulsive
- Make mature decisions at times, and childish ones at others

Signs of at-risk teen behavior:

- Behavior problems = discipline
- A sudden change in behavior
- Academic problems
- Limited goals for the future
- Lack of confidence, low self-esteem

What You Can Do

Simple, everyday activities can reinforce the connection between you and your teen. Make room in your schedule for special times when you can, but also take advantage of routine activities to show you care.

Tips to keep in mind:

- **Share "ordinary" time.** Take advantage of everyday opportunities to talk with your teen. By establishing casual communication around the day-to-day stuff, it will make it easier and more natural to have those "hard" talks.
- **Have family meals.** Schedule regular weekly family dinner nights. Sit down together, turn off the TV and talk. Research has shown that families who eat together have children with higher self-esteem.
- **Get involved and stay involved**. Parents who take a "hands-on" approach with their teens not only have better relationships with their kids, but also reduce the teenager's at-risk behaviors.
- **Be interested**. Make it clear that you care about your teen's ideas, feelings, and experiences. If you listen to what he or she is saying, you'll get a better sense of the guidance and support needed.
- **Set clear limits**. Teens still need your parental direction and boundaries. Make sure consequences are related to the behavior, and **be consistent** in following through. Don't sweat the small stuff.

"Hands-on" parenting tips:

- Expect to be told where you teen is going and who they are spending their time with
- Be aware of how your teen is doing in school and after school
- Assign chores to be completed on a regular basis
- Set a curfew and stick to it
- Be aware of your teens daily activities
- Get to know their friends
- Monitor what your teen watches on TV and their activity on the internet
- Find a common interest or hobby you can share together

Your words and actions help your teen feel secure. Don't forget to say and show how much you love your teen!

Sources: Strengthening Families and Communities, 2011 Resource Guide. www.imom.com

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