



District I Parenting News

Extension Nutrition Program

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Raising Responsible Youth



Adolescence or teen years are a time of transition. It is the job of young people to explore and search of independence. They are expanding their thinking ability and their bodies are maturing physically which brings lots of emotions.

Each teen is unique and will go through the teen years in a different way and at a different pace. What one family may experience may be very different from what another family experiences. Even teens from the same family experience teen years differently.

Although many teens will participate in normal risk-taking behaviors of some sort, it is important for parents to remember that most teens do not run into major problems. Conflict between parents and teens tends to increase. These "battles" between parents and teens are usually over routine matters. So what can parents do to influence and help their teen move safely toward independence and young adulthood?

Love unconditionally. Parents should tell their teens they care. They should not be afraid to hug their teens and say, "I love you." Parents need to accept teens for who they are, not what the parents wants them to be. Love and acceptance do not mean parents have to approve of everything their teens do.

Be proud. Teens want and need approval and want to know their parents are proud of them. Show appreciation for the positive things teens do.

This is especially important in early and middle teen years when kids are uncertain about doing things correctly, especially in social situations. They do not want to look "stupid" in front of their peers.

Praise appropriate behaviors. Praise can be effective because teens are more apt to repeat a behavior that pleases a significant person. Be sensitive to the needs of the adolescent, especially when criticizing them. Don't rant and rave and yell at them. Such emotional outbursts are not a very effective form of discipline and if negative words are used on a regular basis, a teen's self-esteem can suffer.

Be involved. Parents are important in the lives of teens. They need their parents to be involved in their lives. Parents need to be available when teens want them. Teens may not come running up to a parent and hug them like they used to do, but they still need parents to be there, to be interested, and to provide support. Support and unconditional love are especially important when something has not gone as well as the teen had hoped it might.

Talk each day. With today's busy lifestyles, it may seem impossible to find a time to talk when parents and teens can give each other their undivided attention. Establish a set time to talk each day. It may not be long - perhaps just five minutes. Try to "create" additional time to talk to each other. Perhaps sharing a ride to an activity will be an opportunity to touch base and find out how things are going. By establishing



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these talk times, the teen becomes comfortable talking to the parent and will feel more comfortable talking about serious issues of concern as they arise.

Be observant. If the parent sees the teen is not feeling good about something, acknowledge the teen's feeling. By recognizing what the teen is feeling, the parent opens the door for the teen to share what has happened. Listen to what is being shared. Avoid offering a "pat" solution or quick judgments. Instead ask helpful questions that help the teen work through the issue.

Guide and advise. Teens look to parents for guidance and advice. Although they often question the validity of their parents' values and standards, they look to their parents for direction. Teens see issues related to personal choice, while parents see them as right or wrong. Parents can help teens explore and clarify issues and consequences of actions through discussion. They can talk about what might happen "if...."

Establish boundaries. Teens need and want limits. Limits provide teens with a framework within which they can explore yet remain safe. Limits need to be clear, reasonable, age-appropriate, and change as they child moves through the teen years. For example, a curfew established when the child was 14 will probably need to be extended when the youth 17. Parents can involve teens in the discussion of what the limits might be. However, it is the parents' responsibility to set and consistently enforce the limits.

Parents may need to say "no." A parent's reason for saying "no" needs to be logical. It may be hard to say no and the teen may not be very happy with the parent, but in some situations "no" is the right answer. Parents should remain calm and not change their minds.

Recognize limits will be tested. A teen will not always follow the rules. Parents need to recognize that rules will be broken and they cannot control what a teen does away from home. Teens need to accept responsibility for their behavior.

Build trust. Parents should trust adolescents to do the right things. Teens earn a parent's trust by

doing the "right" things. If curfew is at 10:30 pm, then the teen is home at 10:30 pm. If there is a reason the teen will be late, the teen needs to call and let the parent know why. This repetition of the teen doing "what they are suppose to do" builds trust with the parents. If, however, the youth does not do what he is suppose to do on a regular basis, this sense of trust crumbles and the parents and teen need to work on rebuilding trust.

Use fair or natural consequences. When a limit is not followed a consequence follows. The consequences may be logical or have been predetermined so both the parents and teens know what will happen. Consequences are only effective if the consequence is meaningful to the teen.

Model appropriate behavior. Actions speak louder than words. Parents should strive to set a good example in the way that they live. Teens can learn appropriate life skills as well as how to solve problems effectively by watching parents and adults.

Monitor behavior. Parents should know where teens are, what they are doing, and whom they are with. Monitoring does not mean that parents know where their teens are every minute of every day. It does mean that parents are aware of what is happening in the teen's life. Teens should keep parents informed as plans change. A simple call indicating a change in plans may be all that is necessary and is a great way for teens to build trust with their parents.

Parenting takes time and effort. As the youth grows and matures into an independent, responsible adult, both parents and adolescent can look back over the journey through the teen years and appreciate the changes that have occurred.

