

Parent / Teacher Guide: Ten Tips for Raising & Teaching Teens

Provided by Clubs In The City Youth Development

Teens can be perplexing to understand. Gaining cooperation and protecting youth from peril can be extremely tough. Most of us feel inadequate much of the time. Our natural responses often don't seem to work. Let these tried and tested tips be your friend. They will be worth your effort.

1. Give Reasons

When you give an instruction or a "don't," always **respectfully give the reason**. Teens need reasons because they are developing their reasoning capacities. When we give reasons in a respectful manner that expresses your interest in their needs, and your care for their success and well being, teens are much more likely to understand and cooperate.

2. Listening

Listening is crucial. Always take time to listen and let youth air out their thoughts and feelings. When youth are allowed to ventilate and air feelings and needs, they will often arrive at the right choices themselves.

- a. Agree wherever you can agree.
- b. Where you must disagree, approach it by offering a different way to think about it.
- c. Help youth talk out positive and negative results of options and choices.

3. Spend time daily giving focused attention

Listening with eye contact, enjoying things together (parents at least 30 minutes a day).

- a. If a teen is always isolating themselves from you and never taking time to be together, build "together time" into the daily schedule. Keep the commitment and expectation. The teen may resist and balk outwardly, but inwardly they will appreciate it.
- b. Work with the teen to determine the best time for them. Teens have physical and emotional wiring that is very different than adults. Try to work with their flow where possible.
- c. Family meal time, at least 3 times a week at a consistent time, does wonders for the soul. Family night once a week, on a night that doesn't conflict with other healthy teen activities, does wonders for the soul (let teens help decide how to spend family night, but parents should also create special ideas.)

4. Create support systems for your teen outside the home

The teen years are a time of becoming independent from mom and dad in preparation for adulthood. Place your teen in programs you trust so that they have positive influences outside the home to aid you in shaping their thinking and choices.

5. Don't withhold "positives"

No matter how rebellious or disobedient a teen is, **do NOT withhold "positives" that are essential to a teen's well-being**. (This goes against human nature and is counterintuitive, but as we dial down from anger, we can do this with God's help.)

- a. Give lots of genuine affirmation and praise (Be real, not phony. Affirm things that are true. Too mad to think of any? Pray and ask for reminders and insight.)
- b. No matter how tough you have to be with consequences or restrictions, **don't refrain from praise, focused attention, hugs and listening during the punishment period**. (Absence of these can cause more rebellion.) These help teens to know that your intentions are for their good and to trust you, even though they don't like your answers or restrictions.

- c. Beware: If you are not giving praise, focused attention, hugs and listening when teens are behaving well, they will misbehave to get any attention at all, even if that attention is anger and yelling. An absence of positives can cause rebelliousness.
 - d. Don't keep youth out of mentor outings and youth development programs as a punishment. These people and programs are your allies and will reinforce the results you are hoping to see. The programs are costly to the donors providing them as a gift. Missed activities and training can't be retrieved.
 - e. Instead, withhold privileges and rewards such as TV time, outings with friends, computer game time, phone use, car use, etc.
- 6. Give teens gradual opportunities to prove responsibility and make their own choices.** Back up or move forward, according to their progress. Talk out the process with them. Celebrate progress. The goal is to fully "equip" teens for freedom by age 18.
- 7. Avoid saying "no" as much as possible.** Instead respond with "let's think through this."
- 8. Avoid coercion.** Take yourself out of the "battle." Let youth know you care about their desires and interests. Give choices. Help the youth think through results of choices, both short and long term. Let the battle be between the youth and the options and results of options.
- 9. When teens refuse to make a good choice** for themselves and the stakes are serious, you must be the one to say no out of your EXPRESSED commitment to their safety and success.
- a. Hold the line and don't give in, no matter what.
 - b. Once you have said no twice, and given clear CARING reasons, remain silent. (Ignore whining, complaints, insults.)
 - c. Continue giving essential positives (see above.)
 - d. Remove the youth from dangerous options if "defiance" or "sneaking out" starts taking place. (Enroll youth in round the clock programs, move to a different location, visit relatives on weekends, change schools, etc. It is worth the trouble. You will be glad you did in the long run.)
 - e. Connect the teen with caring authoritative male figures to aid you in setting and enforcing firm boundaries (a relative, a mature mentor, a youth worker, a pastor.)
- 10. Admit personal mistakes**
- a. Be quick to admit mistakes we make in our reactions or actions. This helps teens to trust us more and helps them to evaluate and admit their own mistakes.
 - b. Our committed effort to change and not take our mistakes lightly will help our youth rise out of their defeating behaviors. When we feel helpless to change, God has the ability to help us. When youth see us ask God for help, they will ask God for help.
 - c. Sharing the challenges we had and mistakes we made when young usually helps teens see us as more real and relatable.
- 11. Understand** that youth who have experienced abandonment, abuse, or serious disappointment by any significant adult in their lives carry deep seated wounds and feelings of mistrust. A caring, diplomatic, respectful approach in all the ways listed above is needed by parents, caregivers and teachers in their lives to gain or restore trust.
- a. Gaining that trust can be a process that takes time. Adults should be patient with challenging attitudes of youth during this process. Take care to respond in caring, respectful ways, but hold the line of expectations in the process. Take care not to return to youth the anger they are dishing out.