

Points for Parents...

About helping your teen make responsible choices

Parties where alcohol and other drugs are available...pressure to have sex...pressure to join a gang...These are serious situations that teens face. As a parent, you wish you could always be there to protect your teen from things that could hurt him/her, but it doesn't always work out that way. As your child grows older, parenting is less about control and more about offering direction. By sharing your time, experience, values and love, you can help your teen make healthy choices.

Quick Facts:

- It is normal for teens to challenge their parents' values, beliefs and practices as a way to assert their independence
- Teens need support and guidance from their parents to make important decisions about their future.
- The more controlling parents are, the more rebellious teens are likely to become.

Tips for Parents

When your teen is faced with making a decision and wants to talk to you about it, make the most out of this opportunity! If you follow the tips below, your teen will know that you want to help but won't take control and make the decision yourself. Your approach to any discussion has a real impact on whether or not your teen will feel comfortable coming to talk to you in the future.

1. Allow your teen to describe the problem or situation.

- Ask how s/he feels about the problem.
- Ask questions that avoid "yes" or "no" responses. Formulate questions that begin with "how," "why" or "what."
- Really listen to what your teen is saying, instead of thinking about your response.
- Try to put yourself in your teen's shoes to understand his/her thoughts.

2. Talk with your teen about choices.

- Teens sometimes believe they don't have choices. Help your son/daughter to see alternatives.

3. Help your teen to identify and compare the possible consequences of all the choices.

- How will the results affect your teen's goals? For example, how would smoking affect playing on the soccer team?
- Explain (without lecturing) the consequences of different choices.

3. Allow your teen to make a decision and carry it out.

- Ask if your teen has a plan.
- Ask if your teen wants to hear your point of view. If not, don't give it!
- Remember, your teen may make different choices than you would prefer.

4. Later, ask your teen how things worked out.

- What did s/he learn from the decision?
- Allow your teen to live and learn from mistakes.
- Praise your teen when s/he makes a good choice.

Respect!

Teenagers with high self-esteem and self-respect make more responsible health choices.

Help your teen to build these characteristics by:

- allowing him/her to voice opinions
- allowing him/her to be involved in family decisions
- listening to his/her opinions and feelings
- helping him/her to set realistic goals
- showing faith in his/her ability to reach those goals
- giving unconditional love

Facing Peer Pressure

How will your teen handle peer pressure to drink, smoke, have sex or get into a fight? Talk with your teen about ways to handle risky situations to prepare him/her to make safer choices. To feel comfortable talking openly with you, your teen needs to know that you will not punish him/her for being honest.

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