

living with teens

Adolescence can be a challenging time for young people and their families. The teenager is going through rapid physical and emotional changes. Parents and adolescents must make changes in their relationships to adjust to this new stage. The teenager goes backwards and forwards between wanting freedom and at the same time still needing the security of the family.

Parents want their teenager to grow to happy independence yet fear for their safety as they watch them spread their wings. Parents also have to cope with the fact that the dreams they have had for their children may not be going to come true. Teenagers have their own dreams.

Good relationships with your teenagers will help you and them to weather the ups and downs, but they will need more effort than in the past.

What parents can do

Spend time with your teenager

This is often hard to arrange as young people will want to spend a lot of time with their friends. You may have to be very flexible in order to make sure it happens.



Here are some suggestions for special times:

- Mealtimes — if the family eats together at least on some occasions you can share successes, ideas and interests.
- Driving somewhere in the car gives you a good opportunity for time together. Teenagers often talk more easily when not looking at you face to face.
- Bedtime — a visit to their bedroom for a short bedtime chat can be very relaxing.
- Coffee time — use a few spare minutes to offer to take your teenager out for a coffee or milkshake (probably at a shop where their friends don't usually go).

It isn't easy to find special times but it's worth it! Take an interest in their interests and share your interests with them too.

- Try really listening to some of their music and then talk about the songs you like best.
- Go to watch their sport or activities.
- Watch their favourite TV shows with them sometimes - without being too critical.
- Try sharing something about your work or your interests as you would with an adult friend.
- Share something about your own adolescence without preaching!
- Take them to a movie that you would both like (or go to one of theirs and talk about it).

Listen to them

When young people talk to parents they often get advice, reassurance or a sermon before they have had a chance to really say how they feel. This not only stops communication, it also discourages teenagers from finding their own way to deal with problems. The most helpful responses from parents are ones that show interest and open the way for the teenager to talk on, such as:

- “How come?”
- “You must have felt...”
- “Wow”
- “That sounds exciting...”



Respect their privacy

- Give them some space of their own and don't enter their rooms without permission.
- Don't go through their diaries or drawers in their absence.
- Don't pry for information, except where it is important for you to know to make sure they are safe. For example, it is OK for you to ask young teenagers to let you know where they will be when they are not at home.

Show your love for them

Love needs to be continually shown in order to be felt.

- Tell your teenagers often that you love them.
- Show your love by touching and hugging (teenagers who say they are too old for hugs will often accept a quick hug away from their friends or will like to have their aches massaged after sport).
- Put little treats in their lunches sometimes.
- Buy something on a shopping trip that says, "I was thinking about you."
- Go out of your way to help them with special projects.
- Pick them up from outings on the other side of town.
- Leave a note on the pillow saying "I love you" or "You are special" or tell them that you felt proud of something they have done.

Make special memories

Doing special things together can have lasting effects.

- Allow your teenager to take a friend with you on a holiday.
- Take the family to a special show you would not usually go to.

Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
- Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
- Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
- Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
- Women's Infolink **1800 177 577**
- *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
- *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information

Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

- Explore a special place with your teenager.
- Create traditions that are special to your family e.g. a special way that you always celebrate birthdays.
- Make sure that your teenager feels part of the wider family e.g. by sharing family occasions. (Teenagers may groan about these for a while, but try to show them the importance of belonging to an extended family).
- Make a collection of photographs of family and friends through their childhood and growing up years and hang them on a wall.

Have faith in them

- Let them know they are special.
- Ask their advice about something they know a lot about (e.g. how to program the video).
- Display their photographs and crafts.
- Keep a scrapbook of their special achievements.
- If they make mistakes have faith they will do better next time.



Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

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Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



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