

## Tips for Parenting Adolescents

**Symptoms:** Increased emotional highs and lows, long periods of silence, frequent eye rolls and heavy sighs, arguments to every statement you make, increased doubt in your general level of intelligence.

**Diagnosis:** Adolescence.



**Treatment Recommendations:** Patience, creativity, persistence, lots of love, and the occasional deep breath.

Adolescents are not the only ones going through a metamorphosis. The new, more complex needs of a growing teenager require new parenting skills from the adults who love and care for them. Here are some tools and techniques that can help.

### Choose Your Battles Wisely

A big challenge parents face as children grow up is how to nurture a growing independence without losing the pillars

of safety and well-being. Loosening the reins to let teens make their own decisions, and sometimes their own mistakes, is part of the process. As parents, it can be hard to let go of the control we have known for so long. From clothing choices to hair styles to the friends they choose, teens are going to start making their own choices. Sometimes parents will agree with those choices, sometimes not. The question is when to challenge a teen's choices. Reviewing the 3 S's can help:

1. Does the choice they are making affect their Safety?
2. Does their choice have Sexual implications?
3. Is there a Social component to the decision that needs to be addressed?

If the answer to these questions is No, then it's probably best to leave well enough alone. If, however, you answer Yes to one of the 3 S's, your involvement might be justified.

For example, what if your son wants to add the latest and greatest app to his mobile phone? He says EVERYONE



has it, so he needs it too. You research and find out that the app is often cited as a gateway for bullying and harassment. As a parent concerned about *Safety*, you can step in and talk about why you won't let him have that particular app. On the other hand, say your daughter wants to wear an outfit you dislike. Does the outfit *Sexualize* her? If not, then letting it go can be OK. She is perfectly safe expressing her independence by wearing pinstripes

and tie dye, even if you don't like it. The biggest part in both these examples is to communicate your reasoning with your teen.

### Include Teens in Decision Making

Teens do not like to be told what to do. In fact, when told what to do they often choose to do the opposite just to assert their independence. A better strategy may be to include your teenager in the decision-making process, thereby gaining their buy-in and support for the final decision. For example, allowing a teen to have a mobile phone goes



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“Don't demand respect as a parent. Demand civility and insist on honesty. But respect is something you must earn – with kids as well as with adults.”

~William Atwood



hand-in-hand with responsibility for its use. Sitting down together to work out a shared list of rules and responsibilities leads to better understanding on both sides of what is expected and why. What apps are OK? Which ones are not? Why? Expressing your concerns in a respectful way helps your teen understand that your goal is (again) their *safety*, but you also want them to know you respect their independence and ideas.

Getting a teen's input on decisions can also help you as a parent develop trust in how their thought process works. Some key areas to cover when making decisions together include:

- Identify the problem/goal
- Share your perceptions



- Listen to their perceptions
- Stick to the issue at hand
- Brainstorm solutions
- Role play potential outcomes
- Make a decision together

### Be There – No Matter What

Gary Chapman, author of *"The 5 Love Languages of Teenagers"*, emphasizes that despite what their body language and verbal language may say, teens crave the comforting, stable presence of a parent figure in their lives. Chapman says, "Teenagers need their parents now more than ever. All research indicates that the most significant influence on the life of a teenager comes from his or her parents. It is only when parents become uninvolved that their main role of guidance is replaced by someone or something else."

Stay involved. Know who their friends are. Get to know the parents of those friends. Be involved in their school community or sporting groups. Being present in their lives is half the battle. The other half is communicating with them. How they communicate and how they prefer to be communicated with is changing. Take time to figure out what is the best



method, time, location, etc., to reach out to them. Some teens prefer one-on-one time with parents, others prefer written notes of affection and support, and still others need that hug or pat on the back that lets them know they are safe and loved. Find the right method that works for your evolving young adult. Then let them know that no matter what, you are there for them. That you will keep their confidences, be their emergency call responder, and above all love them no matter what.

For more ideas on parenting adolescents, call PAS at (800) 356-0845. Masters' level counselors are available 24/7/365 for immediate support. Or visit [www.paseap.com](http://www.paseap.com) for downloadable information and other resources.

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