



H.O.P.E Newsletter – Issue 8

10 Parenting Tips for Raising Teenagers

How do you breach the barriers of adolescence? Here are 10 parenting tips for raising teenagers.

By Jeanie Lerche Davis

From the WebMD Archives

Your chatterbox son now answers your questions with a sullen "yes" or "no." Your charming daughter won't go to the store with you at all anymore. They must be teenagers. Don't despair. It's natural -- and important -- for kids to break away from their parents at this age. This emotional separation allows them to become well-adjusted adults.

Yet these must be among the most difficult years for any parent. To help with parenting tips, WebMD turned to three national experts:

David Elkind, PhD, author of *All Grown Up and No Place to Go* and a professor of child development at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston.

Amy Bobrow, PhD, a clinical psychologist and professor in the Child Study Center at New York University School of Medicine in Manhattan.

Nadine Kaslow, PhD, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Emory University.

10 Parenting Tips

1. Give kids some leeway. Giving teens a chance to establish their own identity, giving them more independence, is essential to helping them establish their own place in the world. "But if it means he's going out with a bad crowd, that's another thing," says Elkind.

2. Choose your battles wisely. "Doing themselves harm or doing something that could be permanent (like a tattoo), those things matter," says Kaslow. "Purple hair, a messy room -- those *don't* matter." Don't nitpick.

3. Invite their friends for dinner. It helps to meet kids you have questions about. "You're not flat-out rejecting them, you're at least making an overture. When kids see them, see how their friends act with their parents, they can get a better sense of those friends," Elkind tells WebMD. "It's the old adage, you catch more bears with honey than vinegar. If you flatly say, you can't go out with those kids, it often can backfire -- it just increases the antagonism."

4. Decide rules and discipline in advance. "If it's a two-parent family, it's important for parents to have their own discussion, so they can come to some kind of agreement, so parents are on the same page," says Bobrow. Whether you ban them from driving for a week or a month, whether you ground them for a week, cut back on their allowance or Internet use -- whatever -- set it in advance. If the kid says it isn't fair, then you have to agree on what *is* fair punishment. Then, follow through with the consequences.

5. Discuss 'checking in.' "Give teens age-appropriate autonomy, especially if they behave appropriately," says Kaslow. "But you need to know where they are. That's part of responsible parenting. If it feels necessary, require them to call you during the evening, to check in. But that depends on the teen, how responsible they have been."

6. Talk to teens about risks. Whether it's drugs, driving, or premarital sex, your kids need to know the worst that could happen.

7. Give teens a game plan. Tell them: "If the only option is getting into a car with a drunk driver, call me -- I don't care if it's 3 in the morning," says Bodrow. Or make sure they have cab fare. "Help them figure out how to handle a potentially unsafe situation, yet save face," she suggests. "Brainstorm with them. Come up with a solution that feels comfortable for that child."

8. Keep the door open. Don't interrogate, but act interested. Share a few tidbits about your own day; ask about theirs. How was the concert? How was the date? How was your day? Another good line: "You may not feel like talking about what happened right now. I know what that's like. But if you feel like talking about it later, you come to me," Elkind suggests.

9. Let kids feel guilty. "I think too much is made about self-esteem," says Elkind. "Feeling good about yourself *is* healthy. But people *should* feel bad if they have hurt someone or done something wrong. Kids need to feel bad sometimes. Guilt is a healthy emotion. When kids have done something wrong, we hope they feel bad, we *hope* they feel guilty."

10. Be a role model. Your actions -- even more than your words -- are critical in helping teens adopt good moral and ethical standards, says Elkind. If they have a good role model from early on, they will be less likely to make bad decisions in their rebellious teen years.

WebMD Feature Reviewed by Charlotte E. Grayson Mathis, MD on August 11, 2003

Sources

SOURCES: David Elkind, PhD, author, *The Hurried Child* and *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*; former chairman of child development, Tufts University School of Medicine, Boston. Amy Bobrow, PhD, clinical psychologist, Child Study Center, New York University School of Medicine, Manhattan. Nadine Kaslow, PhD, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, Emory University, Atlanta.

Sources

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