

# Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES  EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

NEWSLETTER

Issue 31

## Ten Steps to ENJOYING YOUR TEENAGER

Teenagers live in a whirlwind of conflict and change. Physically, emotionally and socially they are experiencing new feelings, facing new challenges and trying to figure out exactly where they fit into the world around them. They want to be independent, but they still need a parent to pay the bills, lend the car and provide the basics, like food, shelter and designer jeans.

Raising a teen is like having a front-row seat on the longest roller coaster ride of your life. One minute you're bursting with pride, and the next you're bickering over dirty dishes and empty gas tanks. How can you make life with teenagers more enjoyable?

### 1. Remember what it was like

Try to remember what your own adolescence was like. How did you feel about your looks? What were your biggest fears? What did you do to rebel? Remembering and discussing your own teen years, will help you communicate better with your teen. It will get you in touch with the dramatic upheaval of emotions and hormones you experienced in your own life, and allow you to show more sensitivity, acceptance and understanding to your teenager.

### 2. Make time for your teenager

Whether they show it or not, teens need their parents' support and acceptance. With parents and teens both running busy schedules, it is often hard to find any time to spend together. But, by making yourself available to your teen in small ways, you are letting him/her know you are interested in their life and will support them through the good and the bad.

Establish a family night, where everyone eats together and talks about their day. Or have a

regular "date" night where you and your teen go out to dinner and a movie. You could also sign up for a class you are both interested in, or volunteer for a charitable cause that's close to your teen's heart. It doesn't really matter what you do, as long as you are enjoying your time together.

### 3. Listen!

The most important thing any parent can do is to listen. Teens need to feel that their opinions matter, and that they can depend on their parents for help. By taking the time to listen to your teen, you will actually have more influence in their lives. You will know what is going on at school, with friends and what challenges they may be facing. By listening and not judging, you are showing your teen that you're interested in them as an individual, and that you respect their ideas. Besides learning all about your teenager, you may find that they will actually begin listening to you!

\* Permission to photocopy with credit given to Jennifer McCarthy, Family Service Canada Consultant.

## Ten Steps to ENJOYING YOUR TEENAGER *(continued)*

### **4. Don't hide from the tough stuff**

Drugs, sex, drinking, violence; kids today are dealing with pressures and issues that you may be uncomfortable talking about. But, you can't let a little embarrassment get in the way of protecting your teen. Teenagers need to know the facts. They also need to know what your family's values and beliefs are, and what type of behaviour is expected.

Still, you may not know how to respond when your child is suddenly asking questions about condoms or whether you've ever smoked pot. The best policy is to be honest and understanding. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them so, and then go find it!

Don't judge or condemn your teen for being curious or having sexual thoughts or feelings. Whether you like it or not, they are becoming adults, and need to have good information available so they can make good choices in the future

### **5. Renegotiate responsibilities and privileges**

Teens need rules and structure, but it is important to renegotiate responsibilities and privileges as they get older. By changing rules and chores to match their growing maturity, you are sending your teen a positive message about trust and respect. Remember to include your teen in these discussions, listen to their opinions and find ways to compromise so everyone is happy.

### **6. Be a role model for the values you believe in**

More than just talking to your teens, parents should strive to be role models for the values they believe in. For example, eating healthy meals and accepting your own body shape will have a greater impact on your daughter's body image than music videos and magazines. The same goes for how you deal with stress and conflict, your ability to control your anger, and your attitude and actions towards drinking and drugs.

### **7. Choose your battles**

From dyed-green hair to messy rooms and missed curfews, there is always a long list of things to fight about. Sometimes it may seem your teen is going out of his way to get under your skin! The only solution is to pick your battles.

Fighting over the little things can lead to constant bickering and build a wall of negative feelings between you and your teen. Try to save your energy (and sanity) for the really important stuff: drugs, school performance, sexually responsible behaviour, and other values that impact on the type of adult your child will become. By choosing your battles, your teen will be more likely to listen when the important stuff comes up.

### **8. Welcome their friends into your home**

Your teen probably spends a lot more time with her friends, than she does with you. One way to keep track of what's happening in her life is to allow your home to become a welcoming place for her circle of friends.

Letting your teenager invite friends in to watch movies, play video games or just hang out shows you care about them and their interests. It also gives you some peace of mind, because you know where they are, what they are doing and who they are with. It allows you to get to know their friends a little better, and it can be a lot of fun!

### **9. Keep in touch with other adults**

Talking to other parents and sharing your experiences will help you deal with the many emotions and challenges of raising a teenager. Discuss family conflicts and look for creative solutions to these problems and other sources of stress. Sometimes just knowing you are not alone will make a world of difference. Keep in touch with your child's teachers as well. This will give you an early warning for any problems at school, and prevent a nasty shock at report card time.

### **10. Show them they are loved**

Finally, look for genuine reasons to compliment your teen everyday, and celebrate their accomplishments, however big or small. Leave notes on the fridge or in their book bags reminding them of how much they are loved, and don't be afraid to touch them. Hugs, kisses, and even high-fives demonstrate to your child that while everything else may be changing, your love will remain constant in their life.

*Family Services* offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

**1-800-668-9920**