

Loving Discipline: Taking Control

The Preteen and Teen Years

Yesterday your 14 year old made you proud by helping out a friend who is having a hard time in school. Today, this same girl said she hates you because you won't let her party with high school seniors! It can be a battle. It's very easy to lose your temper. When you feel like you are losing control, remember these three steps to help you stay calm:

- Take a deep breath
- Count to ten, and
- Put your hands in your pockets so you don't use them on your kid.

Hitting will just make your teen angry. Do not react with anger and yelling. It is your job to teach your teen how to control anger. Stay calm. Be a good role model.

If you need to talk to someone or need help managing your anger, please call the Family Support hotline at 1-800-829-3777. They are there to listen and help you. Don't be afraid to call!

Getting ready to grow up

Think back to when your child was learning how to walk. Your child would take a step, fall, try again, and finally your child would get it! From age 13 (earlier for some) your child is learning to walk out into the world on her/his own.

Your teen's body is changing fast and hormones are causing your teen to act differently from one day to the next. Your teen's brain hasn't finished growing yet. Teens are still learning and will fail many times! Without your help, preteens and teenage kids can make some serious mistakes. They need parental guidance more than ever!

They want to make their own decisions. They are practicing for the day when they will leave you to go out on their own.

Teens question grown-ups. They are learning to think for themselves.

Friends matter more than family. The same teen who once looked up to you will laugh at your silly idea. However, if your teen's best friend suggests the same thing, it will make all the sense in the world. Don't take it personally. Your teen is slowly learning to live without you.

Sometimes teens make risky choices. Their brains have not grown fully, so they can't always make the right choices or think straight. This is one reason why some teens tend to drive too fast, drink alcohol, and have sex too soon.

Just like their parents, teens have good days and bad days. Try to focus on the good.



You are the grown up: take charge!

Teens want rules. Your teen will never admit it to you, but your teen wants and needs some limits. It shows that you care. Explain the rules ahead of time. Also tell your teen what will happen if the rules aren't followed.

Don't just punish your teen for breaking a rule, teach your kid how to do the RIGHT thing. If you punish your child, it may work to stop a certain action once. Sometimes that is necessary to do. If you send a fighting kid to his room, he may stop fighting for the moment. But being punished did not teach the child what to do next time. You taught that he/she gets punished for fighting, but that did not teach what to do instead of fighting. That is a parent's job-to teach kids the right thing to do and how to decide to do it!

Lay down the law. Teens love spending time with their friends, surfing the computer, playing video games, watching TV, driving around town, and talking on the phone. If your teen breaks a rule, you can take away any of these for a limited time, depending on the situation. Your teen should be able to connect what he/she did wrong with the privilege you take away. It might be hard on you, but you must make sure you follow through. If your teen gets a speeding ticket, you could take away the car keys for a month and make sure your teen pays for the ticket.

Grounding. Teens value their freedom and will do almost anything to keep it! Grounding is one way to enforce the rules you set. If your teen sneaks out to go to that party with high school seniors, you could ground her/him. Don't be too harsh. If you ground your teen for six months, your teen will just get really angry and think it's the end of the world. Your teen will give up trying to please you. In general, grounding for more than a few days is hard to enforce.

Treat your teen with respect, even when your teen shows disrespect and talks back. It is very hard to keep calm, but try to model good behavior. Instead of yelling back, calmly say, "It really hurts me when you put me down." If your teen keeps making rude remarks, leave the room. Talk about your teen's rudeness after you both cool off. Do not shame your child or talk down. Show your child how to be polite, respectfully disagree, and be willing to say you are sorry. If you must correct when friends are around, take your teen aside and do it in private.

Use "I" instead of "You." Don't accuse your teen of being bad. Instead of saying, "You're always wasting your time talking to your friends on the cell phone." try "I would like you to spend less time on the cell phone and more time on school work."

Choose your battles. Try not to make a face when your teen comes home with pink hair or a belly button ring. Your teen is just trying to be different. In a way, your teen is also trying to show you that she/he can make choices. As they say, it's just a phase! Save your rules for the important stuff, like drugs and alcohol.

Cheer your teen on when you are proud. Try to focus on the good stuff whenever you can. Reward with more freedom, when earned.

Love, always. Let your teen know that you will always love and be there, no matter what. You may not like what your teen does, but you always love. Don't expect your teen to appreciate it now, but it's true what they say... one day you will be thanked!

Need help? You're not the only one! Don't feel bad about asking for help from friends, family, or other parents. You might also want to take a parenting class. Alameda Alliance for Health can help you find one. For more information, please call Health Programs at 510-747-4577.