Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Being There for Your Teenager

The adolescent years are tough on everyone—parents and teens alike. Through trial and error our sons and daughters seek their independence. And similarly, we gradually learn to let go as parents.



Tips and Tools You Can Use

You help your teen mature when love and trust are the basis of your relationship. A positive attitude and realistic expectations are important. Believe in your teen, but accept that mistakes will sometimes happen.

Teens are faced with many new issues. Some of these include:

- **Normal Body Changes.** Reassure your teen. Avoid jokes about changing voices and developing breasts.
- **Alcohol.** You can be a good role model. Talk about drinking and driving. Make a pack to trust each other by signing up with Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD).
- **Smoking.** Talk to your teen about smoking and its consequences openly. Model good behavior yourself.
- **Drugs.** Stay informed. If you suspect drug use, offer support for wise choices along with disapproval of unwise ones.
- **Social Status.** Shy, insecure teens can be encouraged to join clubs or activity groups where making friends is easier.
- **Romance.** Teen love is serious. Break-ups are devastating. Your sympathy can help diffuse anger and depression.
- **Sex.** Plenty of love at home can reduce the urgency for finding love through sexual encounters. Educate about sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Birth Control.** Teens are often misinformed about the consequences of sex. Talk to them about pregnancy and birth control. If it’s difficult to talk about, try introducing the topic with pamphlets or books.
- **Trouble.** Often a single run-in with the law or an act of petty vandalism is a one-time test of teenage bravado. Ask your teen why it happened and be alert for signs that it is happening again. Seek help when needed.

Opening Doors

- Stay in touch by looking for natural opportunities for conversation when you are both relaxed. During family leisure activities or when you are doing chores together can be good venues for open conversation.

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- Check in without prying, teasing or blaming. This lets your teenager know that you are interested but don’t wish to be judgmental.
- Listen and sympathize when your teen approaches you. Praise whenever possible.
- Accept that teens are naturally secretive and independent.
- Your respect, trust and attention signal that you are always ready to help.
- Use personal guidelines to decide when its time to take a stand, when to argue and when to let go. Some questions to ask yourself might be:
    - Is the issue negotiable?
    - Is an argument productive?
    - Is the behavior harmful?
    - Is experience going to prove the best teacher?
    - Is there a positive approach?
- Remember that constructive criticism is easier to take. Be honest about your own shortcomings and tolerant of theirs.
- If your teen has done something wrong, try to focus your disapproval on the act and not your teen.

The trials of parenting a teenager can make it seem like someone else is suddenly replacing your little boy or girl. Indeed, this is the time when they are developing into their own person. Their relationship with their parents, however, is still the most influential in their lives. Try to understand the trials and issues they face and give them some space to strike out on their own. Make yourself available and open in a non-judgmental, loving way where you can still maintain trust and preserve closeness in their teenage years.