

Keeping In Touch

October 2005

The Village Employee Assistance Program

Living Harmoniously with Your Teen

"Enjoy them now, they'll soon be teenagers!" Warnings like this from friends and relatives, together with media images of adolescents as irresponsible, rebellious troublemakers, can lead parents to expect trouble as their children enter puberty. It is a rare parent who does not approach a child's adolescence without some misgivings.

But family life does not have to be a battleground during the teenage years. You can live somewhat harmoniously with your teen if you know what to expect and are willing to make some adjustments in the way you think and act.

The following tips will help you make the best of your child's teenage years.

Begin by remembering your own adolescence. Asking yourselves questions like "How much did I share with my parents?" "How critical and argumentative was I at that stage?" and "What were my worries and dreams?" can help you to more easily accept your teens' behavior.

Make the most of the good times with your teens. Think about your children's likeable qualities even when they're temporarily exhibiting their unlikeable ones.

See the instability in the relationship with your teen for what it is—separation is a necessary part of his development.

Don't overreact to your teen. Teens often like to bait their parents, and mothers and fathers who overreact can be drawn into a destructive pattern of pointless arguments. The last thing an out-of-control teen needs is an out-of-control parent. Ask yourself, "How do I behave when I'm angry at my teen? Would I want my teen to imitate me?"

If you disagree with the way your teen sees things, don't argue. Instead, state your own case and speak from that. "I have a different opinion," "This is what I believe," and "This is the way I see it."

Help your teen control his anger and express it safely. Make it clear that yelling, cursing, hitting and other forms of aggression are unacceptable. Nonviolent ways to work off anger include: stomping off to his room, pounding a pillow, twisting a towel, crying, talking it out, writing in a diary or doing some form of physical exercise.

Don't talk down to your teenager. There's nothing more irritating than a condescending tone.

Only set limits you are willing and able to enforce.

Keep non-negotiable rules, like "don't drink and drive," to a minimum. If you make a major confrontation out of every issue, family life is likely to become a series of power struggles.



Teen continued on back

New Web Site and Message Center Launched



The Village Employee Assistance Program launched its new website in July and we encourage you to check it out. The newest feature of the website is the "Message Center," which allows you to communicate with an EAP professional through a secure channel. Other features include past issues of the *Keeping in Touch* newsletter, information on services available through The Village EAP, instructions for accessing The Village EAP counseling services, and more.

If you have any questions about the website, please call us at 1-800-627-8220.

"Keeping in Touch" is a monthly publication provided to employees covered by The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employer's benefit package. If you have questions about your EAP benefit, or if you would like to access services, call

1-800-627-8220

TTY ACCESS for the deaf and hard of hearing, call toll free 1-888-510-7433



Back issues of "Keeping in Touch" are online at www.VillageEAP.com. You no longer need a password to access the newsletters.

Teen *continued from front*

Help your teenager believe in himself. Try to recognize your teen's efforts and the good things he does, and reassure him, at every possible opportunity, that he has the qualities you want for him. Give him the message "I don't always understand what is going on with you but I'm on your side and I have faith that you will sort things out and land on your feet."

Take care of yourself. Set aside time, each day if possible, to fulfill your physical and emotional needs. This will restore your energy and sense of perspective.

Listen twice as much as you talk. As parents, we are often so busy imparting wisdom to our children that we forget to listen to them. Only by listening can you really learn to know your child.

Connect with your teen through leisure activities. Discussions about friends, school, and other parts of your child's life tend to come up easily during leisure, allowing you to talk about things in a relaxed atmosphere. Inviting a friend along is a good way to get to know your child's friends.

Monitor Your Teenagers

Research shows that better parental monitoring is related to lower rates of sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, truancy, thoughts about suicide and suicide attempts, running away and delinquency. One study showed that only eight percent of ninth graders whose parents monitored their activities closely were likely to have had five alcoholic drinks in a row during the past month, compared

with 68 percent of ninth graders whose parents didn't keep close tabs on them. A similar trend was noted for sexual activity.

To be an effective monitor, you don't need to be present at every moment. You also don't have to become overly intrusive or violate the privacy that teens typically crave. You do need to show consistent and active interest in your child's life. And you need to be willing to enforce family rules and raise issues that concern you.

It can take courage and strength to stick to your monitoring guns and enforce your rules, but the rewards are immense.

—excerpted in part from Canada's National Clearinghouse on Family Violence

Counselor Column



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Question: *My child has always had some behavior issues but now that he's a teenager things have gotten even worse. What is the best way to respond when my child is pushing the limits and breaking family rules?*

Rachel Blumhardt: Even without a history of behavior issues, children entering adolescence (10 to 14) begin butting heads with their parents. As adolescents start growing towards adulthood they begin to seek independence from others and the ability to control their own lives. One very common way teenagers do this is by questioning parental authority and the guidelines they have been following up to this point in their life. Here are some ideas which might help you in parenting your adolescent son:

Children continue behavior that gets them attention

Pay attention to your son when he follows family rules and he will continue following them in the future. Positive attention can come in many forms including: verbal praise, monetary, or privileges.

Consequences for your teen when he breaks rules should be immediate, enforceable, fit the "crime," and laid down firmly. Consequences foster acceptance while punishments may create resentment.

Punishments have little power to motivate teenagers to cooperate.

Punishments are unpleasant consequences that cannot be avoided. Offer your son an irresistible incentive instead. An irresistible incentive is a way to avoid an unpleasant consequence by performing a desired behavior. For example, if you want your son to clean his room, say "as soon as you finish cleaning your room you can... watch TV, see your friends, etc."

The desired incentive should be controllable by the parent so that until that behavior occurs the desired incentive will not be provided (this may mean controlling car keys, keeping the remote control, etc).

Will this ever be over?

As you help your son understand what he can gain by accepting limits, he may begin to see that his self-interest is best served by following the family rules.

When to seek help.

If your teenage son continues to seem overly frustrated and rebellious it is important to investigate what might be causing the difficulty. Is he depressed and not motivated to do much of anything? Does he know he can "get away with things" because you wish to avoid conflict? Is what you are asking of him unreasonable? Seeking the expert and detached opinion of a professional may be useful in identifying issues that lie beneath these behaviors.