

# Parenting Teens

## Transitioning to a Healthy Adulthood

### Identity

Teenagers seek to discover a positive identity that expresses their individuality. Peers, celebrities, and others they value can influence their decisions. Changes in personal appearance are hallmarks of normal experimentation in identity by teens. Monitoring and some rule setting may be required, but ignore smaller battles in favor of bigger ones that affect health, safety, and well-being.

### Freedom and Limits

Begin treating your teenager like an adult, but do not always expect adult behavior. You will need to set limits and establish boundaries. Look for the balance of what you can accept and what your teen wants. Monitor your teen's schedule, and let him or her know you are aware of activities. Be reasonable, practice "letting go," and decide what are safe risks that promote independence.

### Thought Processing

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### Peers

Feeling accepted and part of a peer group are crucial to teens. They feel abnormal when they are different from their peers. But all peer groups are not equal. Some may experiment with anti-social behavior, alcohol and drug use, or seek to dominate members' beliefs. Talk about peer pressure early to help teens evaluate peer groups later and make choices that match their values.

### The Opposite Sex

It is normal for teens to begin showing interest in the opposite sex. There may be sexual experimentation, but studies show that most teenagers do not have sexual intercourse before graduating from high school. Still, sex education, and giving the right information to teens is important. Starting early to communicate your values and concerns about dating and sexual activities in an open and honest way is better than silently hoping for the best.

### Health & Fitness

Irregular meal patterns, skipping breakfast and fasting to lose weight are not uncommon with teens. Eating disorders frequently begin at this age, and girls are at the most risk. Awareness about substance abuse and eating disorders can alert you to signs and symptoms. Act early with professional guidance if you suspect problems. Lack of rest is also a hazard of teenage living and contributes to moodiness and irritability. Help make sure your teen eats a well-balanced diet and gets adequate rest.

### Self Esteem

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### Communication

Making changes in your communication style or speaking habits, if necessary, can be tough, but will improve your teenager's ability to listen. Preaching, sarcasm, ridicule, yelling, or comparing the teen's behavior with others are actions likely to reap negative returns.

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