

# Responsible Choices

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Being at a party where alcohol and other drugs are available, being pressured to join a gang. These are serious situations that teens face. As a parent, you wish you could always be there to protect your teen from situations that could hurt him or her, but it doesn't always work out that way. As your child grows older, parenting is less about control and more about offering direction. By sharing your time, experience, values, and love, you can help your teen make healthy choices.

## Quick Facts

- It is normal for teens to challenge their parents' values, beliefs, and practices as a way to test parents and assert their independence.
- Teens need support and guidance from their parents to make important decisions about their future.
- The more controlling parents are, the more rebellious teens are likely to become.

## Tips for Parents

When your teen is faced with making a decision and wants to talk to you about it, make the most out of this opportunity! If you follow the tips below, your teen will know that you want to help but you won't take control and make the decision yourself. Your approach to any discussion has a real impact on whether or not your teen will feel comfortable coming to talk to you in the future.

### **Allow your teen to describe the problem or situation.**

- Ask how he or she feels about the problem.
- Ask questions that avoid "yes" or "no" responses. These usually begin with "how," "why," or "what."

- Really listen to what your teen is saying, instead of thinking about your response.
- Try to put yourself in your teen's shoes to understand his or her thoughts.

### **Talk to your teen about choices.**

- Teens sometimes believe they don't have choices. Help your teen to see alternatives.

### **Help your teen to identify and compare the possible consequences of all the choices.**

- How will the results affect your teen's goals? For example, how would smoking affect playing on the soccer team?
- Explain (without lecturing) the consequences of different choices.

### **Allow your teen to make a decision and carry it out**

- Ask if your teen has a plan.
- Remember, your teen may make different choices than you would prefer.

### **Later, ask your teen how things worked out.**

- What did he or she learn from the decision?
- Allow your teen to live and learn from mistakes.
- Praise your teen when he or she makes a good choice.

## **Respect!**

Teenagers with high self-esteem and self-respect make more responsible health choices. Help your teen to build these characteristics by:

### **Responsible Choices**

- allowing him or her to voice opinions
- allowing him or her to be involved in family decisions
- listening to his or her opinions and feelings
- helping him or her set realistic goals
- showing faith in his or her ability to reach those goals
- giving unconditional love

## Facing peer pressure

How will your teen handle peer pressure to drink, smoke, have sex, or get in a fight? Talk with your ten about ways to handle risky situations to prepare him or her to make safer choices. To feel comfortable talking openly with you, your teen needs to know that you will not punish him or her for being honest.

## Resources

- Your teen's health care provider
- Adolescent Health On-Line
- <http://www.ama-assn.org/goladolescenthealth>
- Familyeducation.com
- Learning Network Parent Channel
- <http://www.familyeducation.com>
- National Parent Information Network [www.ericps.ed.uiuc.edu](http://www.ericps.ed.uiuc.edu)
- American Academy of Pediatrics, *Caring for Your Adolescent Ages 12 to 21*, New York, NY: Bantam books; 1991
- Faber, Adele; Mazlish, Elaine. *How to Talk So Your Kids Will Listen and Listen So Your Kids Will*
- *Talk*, New York, NY: Avon Books; 1980
- Haffner, Debra W. *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy*
- *Teens-From Middle School to High School and Beyond*. New York, NY: New Market Press; 2001
- McMahon, Tom. *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents With Kids 11 to 19*. New York, NY: Pocket Books; 1996
- Panzarine, Susan. *A Parent's Guide to the Teen Years: Raising Your 11- to 14- Year Old in the Age*
- *of Chat Rooms and Navel Rings*. New York, NY: Checkmark Books: 2000
- Simpson, A. Rae. *Raising Teens: A Synthesis of Research and a Foundation for Action*. Boston, MASS: Center for Health Communications, Harvard School of Public Health: 2001

- Steinberg, L.; Levine, A. *You and Your Adolescent: A Parent's Guide for Ages 10-20*. Dunmore, PA:
- HarperCollins Publishers Inc; 1997

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