

Helping Your Teenager make Responsible Choices

Throughout their teenage years, your child will be confronted with many difficult situations where choosing to make a safe and healthy decision may not be the easiest – or most obvious – thing to do.

As a parent, protecting your teen from situations that could potentially hurt him or her will always be an intense urge that often cannot be realistically fulfilled. As your child grows older, parenting becomes less about control and more about offering guidance. You can help support your teen in making responsible decisions by providing a solid foundation built upon sharing your time, experience, values, trust, and love.

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.

Whenever your teen comes to talk to you regarding a decision he or she is currently facing, make the most out of the opportunity.

- Allow your teen to describe the problem or situation in their own words.
- Ask how he or she feels about the problem.
- Ask questions that avoid “yes” or “no” responses. These questions usually begin with “how,” “why,” or “what.”
- Really listen to what your teen is saying instead of thinking about your responses.
- Try to put yourself in your teen’s shoes to understand his or her thoughts.
- Teens sometimes believe they don’t have any choice in the outcome of difficult situations. Help your teen to see alternatives that may be smarter, more responsible options.
- Define what constitutes a safe or smart choice. Help your teen understand that their health is often the most important factor involved in decision-making.



Helping Your Teenager make Responsible Choices

- Help your teen to identify and compare the possible consequences of all of the available choices.
- Explain the consequences of different choices.
- Allow your teen to make a decision and carry it out.
- 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?

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

- Allowing him or her to voice their personal opinions
- Involving him or her in decisions that may affect the entire family
- 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
- Being supportive, even when he or she makes mistakes
- Being open and understanding whenever your teen needs to talk to someone