

Communicating Expectations to Teenagers

One of the things that define the teenage years for many parents is difficulty with boundaries and discipline. Teenagers are eager to assert their independence, and this can often conflict with the rules you've set for your family. Dealing positively with these conflicts is important and will set a good example for your teen as he or she matures into adulthood.

Let your teen know you understand her need for independence, but it's important to maintain family boundaries as well. Share a story from your teen years about when you broke a rule, what the consequences were, and what you learned from the experience.

Don't get overly angry with your teenager for misbehaviour. If you have set appropriate expectations for behaviour, all you have to say when your teenager misbehaves is, "You knew what the rules were and what the consequences would be." Convey that the consequences are a result of your teen's behaviour. This helps teenagers understand that they are ultimately accountable.

Negotiate rules with your teenager—teens are much more likely to obey rules if they have a say in the creation of them. They are also more likely to obey rules if they understand the reasons behind those rules, so explain to your teen why you've chosen the boundaries that you have. As kids enter puberty, their

behaviour can change drastically. Continue to monitor which behaviours your teenager has trouble with and help them improve those behaviours.

It is almost always a good idea to allow natural consequences to play out in the situation—be supportive, but let your teen deal with the resulting consequences. Resist the temptation to bail your teen out or minimise consequences. Curfews are an especially contentious issue with teens – be sure to make these decisions before your teen is begging to go out for the evening.

It is especially important to follow through on the consequences you have set for your children. Giving in or letting your teenaged son or daughter talk you out of enforcing your rules reduces your credibility as a parent, and your child may grow up thinking that boundaries aren't important.

Boundaries and discipline can (and probably will) become sensitive issues during your child's teen years. But with open communication and a lot of patience, you can set boundaries and enforce consequences in a fair manner that will help your teenager learn valuable lessons for the future.