



American Academy of Pediatrics



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Communication with Your Adolescent

Adolescence. For your preteen or teenager, this can be a very difficult period. The changes that occur during adolescence are often confusing for both you and your son or daughter. Although this may be a challenging time, it can also be very rewarding to watch your child become an adult. Here are some tips that can help smooth the transition into adulthood for your teen and your family:

- Spend family time with your adolescent. Remember, although many preteens and teens may be more interested in friends, this does not mean they are not interested in family!
- Spend time alone with your adolescent. Even if he or she does not want time alone with you, take a moment here and there to remind your child that your "door is always open;" you are always there if he or she needs to talk. Gentle reminders of this need to occur often.
- When your adolescent talks:
 1. Pay attention.
 2. Watch as well as listen.
 3. Try not to interrupt.
 4. Rephrase his or her words or ask your child to "break it down" to be sure you understand him or her.
 5. If you don't have time to listen right now, set a time when you *do* have time.
 6. It's okay to disagree with him or her, but disagree respectfully, not insultingly.
- Respect your adolescent's feelings. Don't dismiss his or her feelings or opinions as silly or senseless. You may not always be able to help when your child is upset about something, but you can say, "I understand" or "Help me to understand." That's important!
- It's okay to get angry; children at this age can be very frustrating! However, be sure to criticize actions, not character; send "I" not "you" messages.

Example: "I get upset when I find clothes all over the floor" is better than "You're a slob."

- Direct the discussion toward solutions. Be willing to negotiate and compromise. This will teach problem solving in a healthy way.
- When rules need to be set, go ahead and set them! Don't be afraid to be unpopular for a day or two. Believe it or not, adolescents see setting limits as a form of caring.
- Try not to get upset if your adolescent makes mistakes. This will help your adolescent to take responsibility for his or her own actions. Remember to offer guidance when necessary.

- Let your child be the adolescent he or she wants to be, not the one you wish he or she was. Also, try not to pressure your adolescent to be like you were or wish you had been at that age. Be sure to praise your adolescent, not only for success but for the effort as well.
- Be a parent first, not a pal. Your adolescent's separation from you as a parent is a normal part of development – don't take it personally.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. Some little annoying things that adolescents do may not be worth a big battle – let them go. Give your teen some leeway with regard to clothes, hairstyle, etc. Many teens go through a rebellious period in which they want to express themselves in ways that differ from and frequently annoy their parents. However, stay aware of the messages and ratings of the music, movies, and video games to which your child is exposed.
- Don't be afraid to share with your adolescent that you have made mistakes as a parent. A few parenting mistakes aren't that crucial. Parents also should share with their teens some mistakes they made as adolescents.
- Talk to your pediatrician if you are having trouble with your adolescent. He or she may be able to help you and your preteen or teen find ways to get along.

Finally, keep an open line of communication. If you find talking with your child difficult, try writing notes or simply listening. Also, talk to your pediatrician; he or she is there to help both you and your adolescent.

Coping with the problems of adolescence may seem too much for you to take at times, but the important thing to remember is you will make it through your child's teenage years.

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