

Parenting and caring for adolescent children

What does it mean?

You, as parents and carers, shared with us that you would like practical advice and strategies that would enable you to support your adolescent child as they develop.

We understand that there may be challenges as you parent or care for your child, but it can also be balanced with fun and acceptance.

As your child moves into adolescence, there is no doubt that for most families, it can present a challenge for both parents and young people. For some, it is often an anxious time with scary body changes, bullying by peers and a new search for independence. This can lead to:

- **Passive-aggressive behaviour** - "I'll do it in a minute."
- **Self-consciousness** - "What are you looking at?"
- **Self-doubt** - "I'm not good at anything" and/or **over-confidence** - "Well, I thought I could do that."
- **Moodiness** - "Leave me alone."

Dealing with teenagers is by no means an easy task given the frequent changes in behaviours. As they start making their own decisions, it requires a change of relationship between them and you as their parent.

As a parent you will explore the fine balance between offering support whilst letting your teenager (safely) learn from the results of their actions.

During this stage, peer pressure is at its maximum as teenagers sometimes identify with, and value more, the opinion of their friends rather than the opinion of their parents.

If you create a supportive, positive and fun family environment with open communications and encouragement to participate in community activities, your teenager will successfully work through these years into adulthood.

How can parents and adolescent children learn to talk to each other?

First, parents of teenagers do matter. You matter hugely, it is just that you have a different role from the one you had during the early years. Parents matter because they provide the endorsement, the love and the structure that makes a young person feel safe and secure. Without this the teenager will be lost.

Secondly, teenagers do want to talk to their parents. They want to talk, and they will talk, but in a way that feels safe to them. This means the adult talking in a manner that makes the young person feel their views are respected. Good communication must be a two-way street. Talking and listening go hand in hand.

Thirdly, teenagers do need some privacy. They need space and time to sort things out in their own minds. This means they will talk to their parents, but not necessarily at the precise time that suits the adult. In conclusion if you, as a parent, can step back and think about the needs of the teenager, communication will improve. You have a key role to play. If you can listen, your teenager will talk.

John Coleman | Jan 29, 2019

More top tips for parents and carers:

- Timing is critical. Your teenager won't always talk at the time that is best for you.
- Your teenager won't talk about the things they consider to be private.
- Interrogation doesn't work. Your teenager won't talk if he or she thinks conversation is going to turn into an argument.
- Your teenager won't talk if they feel you are busy, distracted or likely to be interrupted.

Supporting your adolescent to manage peer influence

Explore with them what a good friend is and does

This may limit their choice of friends but remind them it is better to have only one or two reliable, trustworthy friends than a wide circle of 'friends' who are immature, reckless and irresponsible.

Support them to develop their own self-worth

Reinforce that they don't need to seek the approval of others. Keep lines of communication open so that your teenager can confide in you and you won't make any judgements. This is really hard when all you want to say is: "they are not a good friend for you!" With teenagers if you can 'coach' them to think things through rather than 'tell' them what to do, it can support them to trust their own judgements.

Support them to access and continue with positive activities

This will ensure that they are not at a loose end, giving them a purpose, interests, and friendships.

Explore with them that compromising their standards will not make them happy or lead to anything worthwhile

Remind them that, while it is good to have friends, they should not feel forced to talk, dress or act in a way that they are not happy with. Recognise that it may be difficult for them to stand up for what they believe in, but that they will be a happier and stronger person if they do.

Finally, and most importantly don't judge them for any mistakes that they do make.

Improving your child's sleep

Sleep is food for the brain and is a vital component to maintaining wellbeing. It is as important as the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. The NHS recommends that teenagers receive a minimum of eight to nine hours good sleep on school nights.

Tips to help your teenager with sleep include:

How much sleep they need

Take time to understand how much sleep they need (different people need different amounts) and when they need to wake up. From that work out a suitable bedtime.

Limit digital devices in the bedroom

If possible, don't have them in the bedroom at all. Light from the screen interferes with sleep and having screens in the bedroom also means your teenager is more likely to stay up late interacting with friends on social media. Turn down the brightness on any screens in the evening and encourage your teenager to have at least 30 minutes to an hour of screen-free time before going to sleep.

Exercise for better sleep

Regular exercise helps you sleep more soundly, as well as improving general and mental health. Encourage them to add some regular physical activity during the day, such as a walk, bike ride, sports club or home workout.

Get outdoors

Try to expose them to as much outdoor natural light as possible, especially first thing in the morning.

Reduce or cut out caffeine

Encourage your teenager to avoid caffeinated or sugary drinks, especially after lunch. Caffeine can be found in drinks such as cola, tea and coffee.

Have a good routine

Encourage your teenager to keep a regular, calm bedtime routine that you agree together. Doing the same things in the same order an hour or so before bed can help them drift off to sleep. This might involve reading, skincare, stretching or breathing exercises or listening to music.

Limit the time spent lying in bed not sleeping. This might mean having a later bedtime if it helps to fall asleep quicker. If a young person does other activities in bed, such as schoolwork or gaming, encourage them to create different 'zones' in their room, if possible.

Eating before bedtime

We know that eating too much, or too little, close to bedtime can lead to an overfull or empty stomach. This can be a cause of discomfort during the night and may

prevent sleep. Discuss this with your teenager and agree what bedtime snacks will fit into their routine and help them get a good night of sleep.

Create a sleep-friendly bedroom

Ensure your teenager has a good sleeping environment, even if sharing a room with siblings. Ideally a room that is dark, cool, quiet and comfortable.

Share time to talk through any problems or worries

This will help them to put their problems into perspective and sleep better. Encouraging them to jot down their worries or make a to-do list before they go to bed should mean they're less likely to lie awake worrying during the night.

Minimise long weekend lie-ins

Encourage your teen to sleep and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. Late nights and long lie-ins can disrupt their body clock and leave them with weekend "jet lag" on Monday mornings.

National resources to help you

My Teen Brain – 10 Things you need to know - this shows how changes that occur in the teenage brain affect behaviour.

[Click here](#)

BBC Bitesize - provides help with homework, revision and learning. Find free videos, step-by-step guides, activities, and quizzes by level and subject.

[Click here](#)

Barnardo's Family Space - This resource is invaluable to families, with lots of topics and advice to support you learn new strategies to support your adolescent child.

[Click here](#)

NHS adolescent support - Click on the link below to access more resources and advice for parents and carers of adolescent children.

[Click here](#)

Where can I get local advice and support?

Hampshire:

[Hampshire Healthy Families Portal](#) - provides information and advice on all things related to health and families in Hampshire.

Isle of Wight:

[Isle Of Wight Family Centres](#) - offer information, advice and support to families on the Isle of Wight with children aged 0-19 years. They recognise that being a parent is rewarding but also brings its challenges as every child is unique. To help you

understand your child and their needs they offer a range of parenting programmes and services to cover all ages and stages including online courses and workshops.

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