

Setting Rules With Teens



What's Happening

Teens may look (and think that they are) full grown, but their brains are still growing and their hormones are changing. This can affect:

- **Decision-making**—Teens make mature decisions at times, and childish ones at others.
- **Risk-taking**—Brain immaturity can result in impulsive or risky behavior.
- **Relationships**—Teens move a little further away from family and a little closer to friends.

What You Might Be Seeing

Normal teens:

- Crave independence
- Question rules and authority
- Test limits
- Can be forgetful
- Have good days and bad days
- Drive you crazy and make you proud

What You Can Do

As a parent, you want to set rules to keep your teenagers safe and healthy and to teach them to get along in the world. While it may be tempting to keep your teen in line by setting strict rules and harsh consequences, your teen is likely to respond by becoming angry and more defiant.

Tips to keep in mind:

- Involve teenagers in setting the rules. They may be more likely to follow them.
- Talk about the reasons behind the rules and what you expect from them.
- Choose your battles, and try to provide choices in the matters that are less important. For instance, you might let your daughter pick her own hairstyle if she comes home on time.
- Make sure your teens understand the consequences ahead of time. What will happen if they break the rules?
- Set consequences that are related to the behavior, and be consistent in following through. Ask teenagers to help decide what the consequences will be if they break the rules.
- Do not make consequences so harsh that you or your teen can't follow through. Consider taking away privileges, limiting time with friends, or assigning extra chores.
- Allow your teens to gradually earn more freedom.
- Get to know your teen's friends and their parents, and let them know your rules and expectations.

Cheer your teens on when they follow the rules! And make sure they know you love and accept them, even when they're not perfect.

This tip sheet was created with input from experts in national organizations that work to protect children and promote healthy families. To download this tip sheet or for more parenting tips, go to www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting or call 800.394.3366.

