

PARENTING TEENS.

Teenagers are children between the ages of Thirteen to Nineteen, and due to this developmental stage they can be hard to deal with, but as parents we need to help them go through this phase of life with ease.

This chapter explores what we can do as parents;

MISTAKES PARENTS MAKE WITH TEENS.

1. EXPECTING THE WORST.

Teenagers get a bad rap, many parents approach raising teenagers as an ordeal, believing they can only watch helplessly as their lovable children transform into unpredictable monsters.

But that sets you -- and your teen -- up for several unhappy, unsatisfying years together.

“The message we give teenagers is that they’re only ‘good’ if they’re not doing ‘bad’ things, such as doing drugs, hanging around with the wrong crowd, or having sex,”

It could become a self-fulfilling prophecy: Negative expectations can actually promote the behavior you fear most. Study shows that teens whose parents expected them to get involved in risky behaviors reported higher levels of these behaviors one year later.

As a parent you need to focus on your child's interests and hobbies, even if you don't understand them. You could open a new path of communication, reconnect with the child you love, and learn something new.

2. SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF.

Maybe you don't like your teen daughter's haircut or choice of clothes. Or perhaps she didn't get the part in the play you know she deserves.

Of course, you'll still be there for guidance and comfort -- you're still the parent. But challenge yourself to step back and let your child know you're there for them.

3. IGNORING THE BIG STUFF.

If you suspect your child is using alcohol or drugs, do not look the other way. Even if it reminds you of your own youth -- you must take action now, before it becomes a bigger problem.

"The years when kids are between 13 and 19 years old are an essential time for parents to stay involved. Parents might consider teen drinking a rite of passage because they drank when they were that age. "But the risks are higher now,"

Watch for unexplained changes in your teen's behavior, appearance, academic performance, and friends. And remember, it's not just illicit drugs that are abused now -- prescription drugs and even cough medicines and household products are also in the mix.

But before you step in, look at the big picture.

Explain to your teen, the consequences of her choices.

"A lot of parents don't want growing up to involve any pain, disappointment, or failure. But protecting your child from the realities of life takes away valuable learning opportunities -- before they're out on their own.

4. TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE, DISCIPLINE.

Some parents, sensing a loss of control over their teens' behavior, crack down every time their child steps out of line. Others avoid all conflict for fear their teens will push

them away.

You don't have to do either of those things. It's about finding a balance between obedience and freedom.

If you put too much emphasis on obedience, you may be able to make your teen fall into line -- but at what price? Teens raised in rigid environments miss out on the chance to develop problem-solving or leadership skills -- because you're making the decisions for them.

Yet too little discipline doesn't help, either. Teens need clear structure and rules to live by as they start to explore the world outside.

As their parent, it's up to you to set your family's core values and communicate them through your words and actions. That's being an authoritative parent, an approach that "helps children develop the skills they need to govern themselves in appropriate ways,"

Remember, your influence runs deeper than you may think. Most teens say they want to spend more time with their parents. Keep making time for your child throughout the teen years. Even when it doesn't show, you provide the solid ground they know they can always come home to.

FIVE TEEN BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS:

A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE.

Is your teenager rebelling, defying your curfew, or hanging out with questionable kids? Here's how to nip behavior problems in the bud.

TEEN BEHAVIOR PROBLEM 1:

Your Teen Seems To Hate You.

One minute your sweet child is begging you to come on the class trip or to lie down with

her while she falls asleep. Then, seemingly overnight, she starts treating you like dirt, discounting everything you say and scoffing at your suggestions.

If you look closely, you'll see that you've been through this before, when she was a toddler -- only instead of shouting "no!" like a two-year-old would, a teenager simply rolls her eyes in disgust.

"It's so hard for parents when this happens," "But part of adolescence is about separating and individuating, and many kids need to reject their parents in order to find their own identities." Teens focus on their friends more than on their families, which is normal too.

Your Solution

Sometimes parents feel so hurt by their teens' treatment that they respond by returning the rejection -- which is a mistake. "Teenagers know that they still need their parents even if they can't admit it," "The roller-coaster they put you on is also the one they're feeling internally." As the parent, you need to stay calm and try to weather this teenage rebellion phase, but no one's saying your teen should be allowed to be truly nasty or to curse at you; when this happens, you have to enforce basic behavior standards. One solution is the good, old-fashioned approach of: "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." By letting your teenager know that you're here for him no matter what, you make it more likely that he'll let down his guard and confide in you once in a while, which is a rare treat.

TEEN BEHAVIOR PROBLEM 2:

Communication Devices Rule Their Lives.

It's ironic that teenage forms of communication like instant messaging, texting, and talking on cell phones make them less communicative, at least with the people they live with. In today's world, though, forbidding all use of electronic devices is not only unrealistic, but unkind. "Being networked with their friends is critical to most teens,"

Your Solution;

Look at the big picture; if your child is performing well in school, doing his chores at home and not completely retreating from family life, it's probably best to "lay off." It's also OK to set reasonable limits, such as no "texting" or cell phone calls during family or school time. Some parents prefer not to let teens have computers in their rooms, since it makes it harder to supervise computer usage, and this is perfectly reasonable. Many experts also suggest establishing a rule that the computer has to be off at least one hour before bedtime, as a way to ensure that teens get more sleep.

One good way to limit how many minutes your teen spends talking on his cell and texting: Require him to pay his own cell phone bills. And do your best to monitor what your child does when he's online, particularly if he or she is using networking sites like Facebook. You still own the home and computer -- so check into parental Internet controls and software to monitor use of any questionable web sites.

TEEN BEHAVIOR PROBLEM 3:

Staying Out Too Late.

It's 10:30 p.m. and you told your daughter to be home by 8 p.m. Why does she ignore your curfew again and again?

"Part of what teens do is test limits," "But the fact is that they actually want limits, so parents need to keep setting them, each and every time."

Your Solution

Do some research before insisting that your child respect your curfew because it's possible that yours is unreasonable. Call a few of your kids' friends' parents and find out when they expect their kids home. Experts suggests giving kids a 10-minute grace period, and if they defy that, to set consequences -- such as no going out in the evening for a week.

If it seems like your child is staying out late because she's up to no good, or doesn't feel happy at home, then you need to talk with her and figure out what might be going on. However, if your curfew is in line with what's typical in your teen's crowd, then it's time to set consequences and then enforce them if your teen continues to break your rules. When you make a rule, you have to mean it. You can't trick teenagers -- they will always call you on it.

TEEN BEHAVIOR PROBLEM 4:

Hanging Out with Kids You Don't Like.

You wince every time your son marches through the door with his greasy-haired, noisy buddies. Should you suck it up, or say something?

Your Solution

Experts advise parents to hold off on criticizing something as superficial as fashion in their kids' friends. "Teenagers are so attached to their friends that criticizing their friends is like criticizing them directly."

On the other hand, if you know that your child has taken up with a group of troubled teens who skip school and do drugs, a talk is in order. "Without putting him on the defensive, tell your child you're concerned about whom he's hanging out with and that you're worried he's doing drugs," While you can't forbid your child to hang around with certain kids, you can intervene and try to nip dangerous behaviors in the bud. Don't be afraid to ask for professional help about hanging out with a crowd engaged in negative behavior. Counseling or family therapy can help.

TEEN BEHAVIOR PROBLEM 5:

Everything's a Drama.

Every little thing seems to set your daughter off lately, and the more you try to help, the more she sobs or shouts or slams the door.

Part of being a teenager is feeling things intensely, so what may seem like no big deal to you is hugely important to her.

Your Solution

Parents tend to underestimate the importance of things in teenagers' lives, "What happens is that kids feel misunderstood, and eventually they will stop telling you anything. Right now it is the most important thing in the world that her best friend is flirting with her boyfriend, and you need to take it seriously."

Don't offer advice, disparage her friends or try to minimize it by saying that one day she'll see how silly high school romances are. "Just listen and sympathize," And put yourself in her position -- because, after all, you were once there yourself.

TEENS AND DRUG/SUBSTANCE ABUSE.

SPOTTING TEEN DRUG ABUSE.

Here are some signs of teen drug abuse to look for:

- **Grades.** Have your teen's grades or study habits declined? Sometimes, drug abuse can send a straight-A student to the verge of flunking out. Often, a sign of drug abuse is a slump that's not quite so dramatic. A teenager might become less diligent about handing in assignments, forget to study for tests, stop participating in class, or skip classes altogether.
- **Friends.** Has your teen stopped hanging around with usual friends? Have new faces – including some that might make you uneasy -- suddenly started to appear? Your teenager may abandon long-term friends, especially if they are not involved in the same abusive behavior.
- **Mood.** Have you noticed mood swings in your teen? Has your teenager become oddly hyper, suddenly furious, sad, or lacking energy? These can sometimes be

a sign of drug abuse. You may notice that your teen also spends more time alone, away from family.

- **Appearance.** Has your teen's appearance changed significantly? You may notice that your teen has been wearing the same shirt for a few days, stopped showering regularly, or completely changed his or her style of clothing.
- **Eating.** Have you noticed any big changes in how your teen is eating, either more or less? You should not ignore any changes in weight.
- **Sleep.** Has your teen's sleep pattern changed? Depending on the drug being abused, he or she might suddenly seem to sleep all day – or never seem to sleep at all.
- **Secretiveness.** Has your teen become excessively secretive about after-school activities, or strangely anxious if you get anywhere near his or her belongings?
- **Hidden trash.** Have you found empty bottles of medicine or empty packages in the trash?

These signs don't prove your teen is abusing drugs; after all, mood swings, changes in sleep patterns, and secretiveness are a part of adolescence. But if you notice anything different about your child, it may be time for a talk.

HELPING TEENS HAVE A STAND ON DRUGS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE.

Despite widespread assumptions, studies show that most teens don't use drugs. But that doesn't mean the teens won't face pressures to take drugs. Here are some tips on how to help them resist them:

Help them learn the following lessons and what they need to do to avoid drugs:

1. **Rehearse what you'll say if you're offered drugs.** Don't get caught by surprise

when someone asks if you want to get high. Decide how you want to respond now. Keep in mind that saying "no" doesn't need to be a big deal. You don't have to give your reasons. A simple "no, thanks" will probably work.

2. **Think ahead and avoid trouble.** If you know that drugs and alcohol will be used at a classmate's party, it's best not to go. If someone you know asks for a ride to a sketchy part of town but won't say why, he may be planning to buy drugs. If you can anticipate situations where you know you'll be exposed to drugs and alcohol, you can learn to avoid them before you get drawn in.

3. **Choose your close friends wisely.** Sometimes, people you know will pressure you to use drugs and alcohol. Some may be unhappy and want company. But you may have a better future in mind for yourself. Be prepared to distance yourself from friends who use drugs and want to drag you down their path. If you have a friend who won't respect the decision you've made, he's not a friend.

4. **Don't be a supplier.** Even if you're not using drugs and alcohol yourself, people you know might push you to get substances for them – maybe by sneaking cough medicine from home or shoplifting it. Don't let that happen.

5. **Find better ways to deal with stress and have fun.** Sometimes, you may feel like an outsider if you don't use drugs. That's okay (after all, you're in the majority). So, figure out ways to meet more of the people who are enjoying themselves without using drugs. Get involved with music, try out for the school play, take up a sport, join a school club, or volunteer in your community.

6. **Get involved.** Taking a stand against drugs and alcohol is often just a personal decision, and you can keep it that way. But if you feel a lot of passion about the issue, go public and help your peers in following the right path.

TEENS AND PEER PRESSURE.

Everyone talks about peer pressure on teens, but just how bad is it? Odds are, it's not as bad as most parents think. Parents may lay awake at night worrying about what other kids will force their children to do. Peer pressure can either be positive or negative, as parent you need to help your teen develop the necessary values which are positive and you also be a positive peer pressure too, let your teen emulate you.

Teens rarely strong-arm each other into trying risky things. Instead, friends play a more subtle role in your child's decisions. Teens are more likely to hang out with other teens that do the same things. For example, a study by researchers shows that kids are six times more likely to have had a drink if their friends often drink alcohol.

The good news? You can have a more powerful positive effect on your teen than you may think. Try and be a confidant to your teen.

Teen Peer Pressure Often Comes From Within and what they hear.

Teens often feel internal pressure to do the things that they think their peers are doing. Most kids wildly overestimate the prevalence of alcohol and drug use.

It is a like a believe that teens are prone to bad behaviour, substance abuse and alcoholism, thereby taking it as gospel truth and decide to try.

Parents who want to dispel the myth that drugs and alcohol are an adolescent rite of passage can simply cite the facts. A long-term, national study of teenagers shows that many typical teen behaviors are actually losing popularity.

Parents assume you outrank Peer Pressure.

Your child can adopt a new dress code to fit in with friends, and still remain keenly aware of your thoughts and opinions. "Parents' influence is much more powerful than most parents realize," "Not wanting to disappoint their parents is an important barrier to

teens using drugs and involvement in bad behaviour."

Take time to connect and talk with your Teen.

Being a teenager is often a dance of push and pull. "Adolescents want to be independent and dependent at the same time," "On one hand, they want to assert their independence. On the other, they need their parents."

Your teen probably feels intense pressure to fit in. She may not know how to talk about it. She may not talk much at all. It may take extra effort to connect with her, but chances are she hopes you will. "The more we understand what kids are going through, the more empathic we can be towards them,"

Be the 'Bad' Guy

Your rules and structure give your teen a framework for understanding the world, even if he protests. When teens are asked what their parents could do to discourage drinking, the answers were surprisingly simple:

- **Talk to us.** Teens say they want to know what their parents think and how they make decisions.
- **Punish us.** Teens who break rules typically wait to see what happens. If there are no consequences, the rules don't matter.
- **Limit overnight visits.** Not having to go home can be too much freedom to handle.
- **Wait up for us.** Knowing they have to face mom or dad, or both, in a few hours makes most teens think twice about the shape they'll be in when they get home.

Encourage Your Teen's Opinions.

Raise your child to have opinions, even if they drive you mad. An opinionated child has practice speaking his own mind.

The child is entitled to his opinion. That doesn't mean things are always going to go his way. He needs to learn to think through how he arrived at his opinion and whether it's worth arguing over.

Teach Relationship Skills.

Kids need friends. Building relationships is an important part of their development and parents have a role in this learning process. You know that relationships are often messy. Your child may not have figured that out yet. Frequent conversations that will help your child develop friendship skills. Open with questions such as:

- What do you like about your friend?
- What are you getting out of the friendship?
- What happens when you don't agree with your friend?

Observe and Comment on Teen Peer Pressure.

Some children come under the influence of a close friend who constantly acts out. If this sounds like your child, your challenge is to share your point of view without criticizing the friend. Lay your worries on the table in a matter-of-fact way. For example:

- "You seem to break the rules every time Johnny comes over."
- "I get calls from other parents when you and Johnny hang out."

Some situations call for dramatic action. A story is told of a family who moved across state lines to remove their son from a destructive friend network. He didn't like it at the time, but thanked his parents years later.

Visualize Peer Pressure.

Role-playing and visualization can help kids imagine what they would do to get out of the pressure zone. Often, kids find themselves in the moment, doing things they never

thought they would do. Help your child practice warding off peer pressure by playing a game of "What if?"

- What if you were at a party and someone had a bottle of pills?
- What if you were about to get into a car and realized the driver was drunk?

The game can serve two purposes. First, it lets your child develop a peer-pressure game plan, which can include calling you. Second, it lets her know she can say no and blame it on you. "My mum would kill me," is a perfectly good way out of these situations.

Help Teens Learn From Their Missteps.

No matter what you say or do, your child may still mess up. As upset as you may be, your child probably is, too. Parents should be ready to help their children take responsibility for their mistakes, and support them in moving on. This is an important time to help a child look at how he makes decisions. "Parents should ask questions that encourage self-reflection,"

Parents can't anticipate every social challenge their children will face. Kids who know their parents love them, who value their own opinions, and have practice thinking critically, have a greater chance of saying "No thank you."

"Everything depends on upbringing." Leo Tolstoy

TIPS FOR PARENTS OF TEENS.

If your child is lying about using drugs or alcohol, looking the other way and assumptions are dangerous mistakes. Study after study shows that parents' involvement plays an important role in preventing adolescent drug use. And the earlier problem is addressed, the better your chances of containing potential damage. Here are six things you can do.

1. Trust your instincts.

Many parents discount their concerns about their child's behavior. They say things like, "I'm probably just being an obsessive parent." Or "Maybe I'm being hypersensitive." But parents know their children. "If a parent's gut is telling them something is off, there has got to be a reason,"

Your teen's behavior may have a simple explanation or a serious cause. Perhaps your child is stressed over schoolwork. Maybe she had a fight with a friend. Or she could have a problem she's afraid to talk about. Turner counsels parents to make it as easy as possible for their teens to talk to them. Start by asking what is going on. Talk about specific things you see and concerns you have, and then be ready to listen.

2. Educate yourself.

As a parent you need to be up to date with information concerning your teens. May be your teen seem withdrawn or developed a queer behaviour, these are signs and unless you know what to look for you might not help your teen.

For instance, drugs rise and fall in popularity over time. It's possible you have never heard of your child's drug of choice. With time and research you can get to know the different substances available to kids today.

3. Don't take it personally.

If you find out your child is lying about drugs, you may see red. You may feel hurt, angry, guilty, and betrayed. All of these emotions are understandable. And none of them will help you help your child.

First, recognize that lying is a normal teen behaviour, but not acceptable and it is the obligation of the parents to teach their kids that lying is unacceptable. Your conversation with your child could cover the following ground:

- Explore the reasons your child lied.
- Understand what is going on.
- Let your child know that lying is not OK.
- Talk about how to be honest in the future.

4. Get help.

A lot of parents try to keep their child's drug use within the family. The idea that addiction reflects badly on the family keeps a lot of kids out of treatment until the problem is too big to handle."

Like diabetes or a broken bone, treating drug abuse requires expertise most parents don't have. If your child is using drugs, you'll have your hands full, even with a professional involved. Start by talking to your family doctor or pediatrician. The counselor at your child's school may be able to recommend specialists or treatment centers that can help both you and your child.

5. Leave room to rebuild trust.

When parents don't trust their kids, problems like drug abuse can escalate. Strained parent-child relations typically cast a negative tone on any and all interactions. Families

tend to do fewer things together, leaving kids fewer opportunities to feel connected to their parents. Parents need to build a safe space for the child, while also defining boundaries and limits.

Try not to let the lies you've been told overshadow every conversation you have with your child. Open, two-way conversations can reinforce your child's awareness of your family values and make the idea of drugs less appealing.

6. Expand your parenting style.

A lot of parents are at one end of the spectrum or the other: overly permissive, or overly aggressive," Substance abuse requires a variety of parenting styles. Sometimes your child will need you to be warm and loving. Other times, you will have to enforce rules your child considers unfair.

Everyone interviewed for this article emphasized how important it is for parents to be their child's parents, not their friends. There's a significant difference.

- Friends think it's OK if another kid does drugs, puts himself in danger, and lies about it.
- Parents love their children and are willing to set limits and boundaries to keep them safe, no matter much strife it causes in the household.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD RESIST NEGATIVE PEER PRESSURE:

- Help your child see the difference between image (who people think she is) and identity (who she really is).
 - Keep the lines of communication open and find out why certain friends are important to your child or teen.
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- If you are concerned about your child's friends, discuss behavior and choices rather than the friends themselves.
- Encourage your teen's independence by supporting decision-making based on principles rather than what others are doing.
- Let your child or teen know if you're concerned about choices she's making.
- Do not attack your child's friends; criticizing your child's choice of friends feels like a personal attack.
- Encourage your child to think about her actions in advance and the immediate and long-term consequences of risky behaviors.
- Give your child or teen love, time, boundaries and encouragement to think for herself.
- Talk to your child about balancing the sense of belonging to a group with the independence of making her own decisions.
- Make sure your teen knows that she is loved and valued as an individual at home.

KNOWLEDGE TO EARN
Learn, Share, Earn

TEEN SEXUALITY AND PREGNANCY.

Helping your adolescent or teen make positive decisions regarding sexuality means having honest and open discussions about the responsibilities and the risks. The following guidelines can help you prepare your teen to be responsible:

- Start the conversation about sexuality early, before your child reaches adolescence.
- Communicate your values and beliefs about teen sexuality.
- Set standards and expectations for how you want your child to behave.
- Pay attention to what your teen is doing, and monitor her whereabouts.
- Know the movies your teen is watching, the books she's reading and the

music she's listening to.

- Don't allow your teen to date someone significantly older.
- Encourage your teen to plan a future that's more appealing than early parenthood.
- Stress the value you place on education.

TEEN DEPRESSION: SYMPTOMS AND TIPS FOR PARENTS.

Could your teen be depressed? Although we are learning more about depression, it's hard to know if a teen is depressed -- irritability and moodiness tend to be features of normal adolescence.

What is teen depression?

Depression is a medical condition that causes psychological and physical symptoms and inadequacy. Depression can happen at any age, including the teen years.

Many teenagers have suffered with depression at some point. But many depressed teens do not get the right treatment. When teen depression goes untreated, the outcome may be serious, and result in:

- Poor performance at school.
- Troubled relationships.
- Increased rates of substance abuse.
- Risky sexual behavior.
- Increased rates of physical illness.
- Increased rates of suicide attempts and completions.

What are the symptoms of teen depression?

The most common symptom of depression is sadness for no apparent reason most of time. Yet, teens with depression may have signs of extreme irritability, exaggerated reactions, anger or anxiety instead.

Depressed teens often have physical complaints, such as stomachaches or headaches. These symptoms may cause absences from school or poor school performance.

Teens with depression may have changes in sleep habits with unexplained crying. They may become extremely sensitive to rejection or failure. Other symptoms may include:

- Feeling helpless.
- Anger.
- Withdrawal from activities.
- Avoidance of peers.
- Apathy.
- Low self-esteem.
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Changes in eating habits.
- Slow or rapid movement.
- Weight gain or loss.
- Substance abuse.
- Difficulty with authority.
- Suicidal thoughts or actions.

How is teen depression diagnosed?

A depression diagnosis is based on the symptoms and the duration of symptoms. Also, the doctor will consider how the symptoms impact the teen's behavior and life.

How is teen depression treated?

Teen depression is a treatable medical problem. Combination treatment is most effective and may include:

- Depression medications to relieve symptoms.
- Talk therapy or counseling to help teens learn new coping skills.

Medications usually include antidepressants

Positive thinking may prevent depression in at-risk teens. Researchers found that teens can learn skills to keep negative thoughts from escalating into depression.

If a teen has severe depression, the doctor may admit the teen to a hospital for observation and treatment.

Can teen depression lead to suicide?

When depression goes untreated, teens may think suicide is the only answer. Feelings of hopelessness may lead to impulsive but deadly acts.

Are there warning signs of teen suicide?

Four out of 5 teens who attempt suicide give clear-cut signs. Here are warning signs every parent must know:

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- Obsessing about death.
 - Open suicide threats.
 - Writing poems or drawing about death.
 - A change in appearance or mood.
 - Defiant behavior.
 - Acting violently.
 - Feelings of guilt.
 - A change in sleep or eating habits.
 - Giving away belongings.
 - Staying away from people and activities.

If your teen hints of suicide, seek help immediately.

With proper treatment and support, teens who consider suicide can get well and return to a healthy life.

Are there tips for parents of teens with depression?

Parenting a teen with depression is not easy. These tips may help:

- **Seek proper treatment.** If your teen has emotions that seem abnormal, talk to a doctor. When teen depression goes undiagnosed and untreated, the teen may try to ease the feelings with drugs, alcohol or suicide.
- **Get involved in family therapy.** Family therapy can help the teen and family to understand depression. Therapy can help members learn coping skills to handle any moods or behaviors linked to depression.
- **Listen to your teen.** Avoid offering advice. Instead, listen and try to uncover problems that may be upsetting your teen.
- **Make sure your teen has consistent bedtimes.** A study from Columbia University Medical Center showed teens with earlier bedtimes get more sleep and have fewer cases of depression and thoughts of suicide. Teens should get around nine hours of sleep every night.

7.8: TEN THINGS YOU MUST TELL YOUR TEEN.

You want -- and need -- to give your teenager advice. So what exactly do they need to hear from you? Is there is a better way than trying to yell advice in their direction?

Here's what to say and, maybe more important, how to say it to get through to your teen.

1. Stop and think.

Teens are risk-takers, and that's good. They can't grow without trying new things and taking some risks. But they also act on impulse, and the two together can be trouble. Ask your teen to stop and think.

It takes a conscious effort for teens to learn how to put the brakes on their brain.

The best place to practice is when using social media. If your teen is thinking about posting a photo or going into an online chat room, urge them to ask themselves: "Why do I want to do this? What risks may be involved? Is it worth it?"

They may not think of using social media as a risky behavior, but like other choices they make, it can have a lasting impact on them. By practicing in one arena, they'll learn to pause to ask the same questions when weighing other choices.

2. Listen to your gut.

Why tell your teen this? Your gut remembers your true self and the guidance of teachers, coaches, parents or leaders. That can help when you're in a tricky situation or uncharted territory.

Let your teen know you have confidence in them to think for themselves and make solid choices. Tell them that learning to hear their "inner voice" takes practice, but it will guide them well (when you're not there).

3. When you think "everyone is doing it," check the facts.

Your teen may learn that everyone else isn't doing *it* -- whether "it" is drinking, having sex, or something else. Finding that out can relieve the peer pressure to do something he or she may not feel ready for.

Take sex as an example. Your teen may think everyone their age is sexually active, but in fact, less than half of Kenyan high schools students are.

He may find out that his peers are not really doing it, but they're letting people think they're doing it while they figure out if it is OK.

4. Decide now when it's OK for you to have sex.

This may sound weird because you probably don't want to think about your teen having sex, but thinking about it now can make a difference, experts say.

Teens aren't great at thinking on their feet. When they work out ahead of time how they will turn down drugs, drinking, sex, or other challenges, they are much better at matching their actions with their values.

Making a plan ahead of time can delay intercourse.

But talking about it happening doesn't mean you're being totally lax or giving your teen a free pass. Be clear about what you expect. For example, you might say, "I want you to delay having sex until it can become part of a meaningful marriage relationship."

Also make sure your teen knows about STDs and how to prevent them, where to get condoms, how to use protection, and how to see a doctor even if he or she doesn't want you to know that they are going.

5. Practice how you will say "NO."

Even adults have trouble saying "NO" sometimes. Rehearsing ahead of time cuts down on the stress of having to say NO and thinking of how to do it. Point out that having a plan will give your teen more resolve and power in sticky situations.

Most likely, your teen can come up with their own ways to say "NO" But when caught by surprise, a good standby is to say, "'Not right now.' In other words, 'I'll do what I like when I want to do it, not when somebody else wants me to.'" This response can also cut down on people asking "Why?"

6. Drinking can destroy your young brain.

Explain that 18 isn't just a random number. The reason the legal drinking age is 18 is because alcohol can cause long-term changes in your teen's brain while it's still developing.

A teen that drinks are also more likely to have unprotected sex and be assaulted or assault others sexually, get in car accidents and fights, and take dangerous dares.

7. Find your passion.

Urge your teen to become an expert in something they love. This will help satisfy their longing for excitement.

He'll learn that he can get thrills from things like performing, being recognized, pushing the boundaries, and being creative -- not just from sex, drugs, or other risky behavior.

Follow this up by making opportunities for him to try new things.

9. People mess up. Learn from your mistakes.

It may seem obvious, but teens need to be reassured that everyone makes mistakes and that they can use theirs as learning opportunities.

For example, a girl who regrets having had sex may think that since she has done it once, does it matter anymore? It's too late to change."

But she can set new limits to avoid making whatever she feels is a mistake twice. Tell your teen that learning from their mistakes will make them wiser.

10. I love you.

It's not really a piece of advice, but it is one of the most important things you can tell your teen. Remind them often that you respect them, want to help them succeed, and are here for them no matter what.

If you do, they're more likely to listen when you give advice.



"The best way to keep children at home is to make the home atmosphere pleasant, and let the air out of the tires."
Dorothy Parker