

THE TIME BETWEEN HOPING EVERYTHING IS OK & KNOWING IT IS.



Monitoring Your Teen's Activities

The teen years are a time of rapid growth, exploration, and risk taking. Taking risks provides young people the opportunity to test their skills and abilities and discover who they are. But, some risks—such as underage drinking—can have harmful and long-lasting effects on a teen's health and well-being.

Parents are a powerful influence in the lives of their teens. When parents make a habit of knowing about their teens—what they are doing, who they are with, and where they are and setting clear expectations for behavior with regular check-ins to be sure these expectations are being met—they can reduce their teens' risks for injury and alcohol use. These parents are monitoring their teens' activities and behavior.

What is parental monitoring?

Parental monitoring includes 1) The expectations parents have for their teen's behavior; 2) the actions parents take to keep track of their teen; and 3) the ways parents respond when their teen breaks the rules.

You are using parental monitoring when you ask your teen

- Where will you be?
- Whom will you be with?
- When will you be home?

You are also monitoring when you

- Check in with your teen by phone.
- Get to know his or her friends and their parents.
- Talk with your teen about how he or she spends time or whether he or she is making safe choices.
- Set and enforce rules for your teen's behavior by clearly explaining the rules and consequences and following through with appropriate consequences when the rules are broken.

Does parental monitoring make a difference?

Yes. Research shows that teens whose parents use effective monitoring practices are less likely to make poor decisions, such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, being physically aggressive, or skipping school.²⁻⁶ Clear communication about your expectations is especially important. Research shows that teens who believe their parents disapprove of risky behaviors are less likely to choose those behaviors.¹

How can busy parents monitor their teens?

As a parent, you face many competing demands on your time. Work or other activities can keep you away from home and limit monitoring of your teen. To help bridge this gap, you can use e-mails, text messages, and phone calls to check in with your teen. You can also seek the support of other family members, friends, and school staff to help monitor your teen's activities and behavior. Teens who have a variety of adults supervising and monitoring their activities may be even less likely to engage in unhealthy and unsafe behaviors.



You can promote a caring relationship with your teen by listening, asking questions, asking for opinions, offering support and praise, and staying involved in your teen's life.

Resources

Where can parents get more information?

- **DC Parent Portal—Raising Healthy Teens** www.cdc.gov/parents/teens/healthy_children.html
- **KidsHealth** <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/positive/>
- **Partnership for Drug-Free Kids** <https://drugfree.org/>

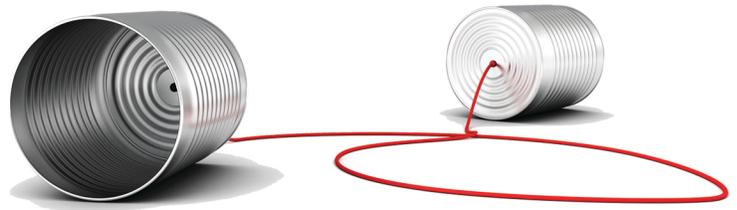
This article is reprinted in part from the CDC's *Monitoring Your Teen's Activities: What Parents and Families Should Know* (Division of Adolescent and School Health; CS239403)

1. Guilamo-Ramos V, Jaccard J, Dittus P. *Parental Monitoring of Adolescents: Current Perspectives for Researchers and Practitioners*. New York: Columbia University Press; 2010.
2. Brendgen M, Vitaro R, Tremblay RE, et al. Reactive and proactive aggression: predictions to physical violence in different contexts and moderating effects of parental monitoring and caregiving behavior. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2001;29(4):293–304.
3. Choquet M, Hassler C, Morin D, et al. Perceived parenting styles and tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among French adolescents: gender and family structure differentials. *Alcohol & Alcoholism* 2008;43(1):73–80.
4. Cota-Robles S, Gamble W. Parent-adolescent processes and reduced risk for delinquency the effect of gender for Mexican American adolescents. *Youth & Society* 2006;37(4):375–392.
5. Li X, Feigelman S, Stanton B. Perceived parental monitoring and health risk behaviors among urban low-income African-American children and adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2000;27(1):43–48. 6. Markham CM, Lormand D, Gloppen KM, et al. Connectedness as a predictor of sexual and reproductive health outcomes for youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2010;46(3 Suppl1):S23–S41.

Funded in whole or in part by the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery through a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



THE TIME BETWEEN HEARING WHAT YOU WANT & LISTENING.



Tips for Communicating With Your Teen

Keeping the parent-child relationship strong during a tricky age

Rachel Ehmke

Reprinted with permission from [The Child Mind Institute \(https://childmind.org/\)](https://childmind.org/).

The teenage years have a lot in common with the terrible twos. During both stages our kids are doing exciting new things, but they're also pushing boundaries (and buttons) and throwing tantrums. The major developmental task facing both age groups is also the same: kids must pull away from parents and begin to assert their own independence. No wonder they sometimes act as if they think they're the center of the universe.

This makes for complicated parenting, especially because teens are beginning to make decisions about things that have real consequence, like school and friends and driving, not to speak of substance use and sex. But they aren't good at regulating their emotions yet, so teens are prone to taking risks and making impulsive decisions.

This means that having a healthy and trusting parent-child relationship during the teenage years is more important than ever. Staying close isn't easy, though. Teens often aren't very gracious when they are rejecting what they perceive to be parental interference. While they're an open book to their friends, who they talk to constantly via text messages and social media, they might become mute when asked by mom how their day went. A request that seemed reasonable to dad may be received as a grievous outrage.

If this sounds familiar, take a deep breath and remind yourself that your child is going through his terrible teens. It is a phase that will pass, and your job as parent is still vitally important, only the role may have changed slightly. Here are some tips for navigating the new terrain:

1. Listen.

If you are curious about what's going on in your teen's life, asking direct questions might not be as effective as simply sitting back and listening. Kids are more likely to be open with their parents if they don't feel pressured to share information. Remember even an offhand comment about something that happened during the day is her way of reaching out, and you're likely to hear more if you stay open and interested — but not prying.

2. Validate their feelings.

It is often our tendency to try to solve problems for our kids or downplay their disappointments. But saying something like "She wasn't right for you anyway" after a romantic disappointment can feel dismissive. Instead, show kids that you understand and empathize by reflecting the comment back: "Wow, that does sound difficult."

3. Show trust.

Teens want to be taken seriously, especially by their parents. Look for ways to show that you trust your teen. Asking him for a favor shows that you rely on him. Volunteering a privilege shows that you think he can handle it. Letting your kid know you have faith in him will boost his confidence and make him more likely to rise to the occasion.

4. Don't be a dictator.

You still get to set the rules, but be ready to explain them. While pushing the boundaries is natural for teenagers, hearing your thoughtful explanation about why parties on school nights aren't allowed will make the rule seem more reasonable.

5. Give praise.

Parents tend to praise children more when they are younger, but adolescents need the self-esteem boost just as much. Teenagers might act like they're too cool to care about what their parents think, but the truth is they still want your approval. Also looking for opportunities to be positive and encouraging is good for the relationship, especially when it is feeling strained.

5. Give praise.

Parents tend to praise children more when they are younger, but adolescents need the self-esteem boost just as much. Teenagers might act like they're too cool to care about what their parents think, but the truth is they still want your approval. Also looking for opportunities to be positive and encouraging is good for the relationship, especially when it is feeling strained.

6. Control your emotions.

It's easy for your temper to flare when your teen is being rude, but don't respond in kind. Remember that you're the adult and he is less able to control his emotions or think logically when he's upset. Count to ten or take some deep breaths before responding. If you're both too upset to talk, hit pause until you've had a chance to calm down.

7. Do things together.

Talking isn't the only way to communicate, and during these years it's great if you can spend time doing things you both enjoy, whether it's cooking or hiking or going to the movies, without talking about anything personal. It's important for kids to know that they can be in proximity to you, and share positive experiences, without having to worry that you will pop intrusive questions or call them on the carpet for something.

8. Share regular meals.

Sitting down to eat a meal together as a family is another great way to stay close. Dinner conversations give every member of the family a chance to check in and talk casually about sports or television or politics. Teens who feel comfortable talking to parents about everyday things are likely to be more open when harder things come up, too. One rule: no phones allowed.

9. Be observant.

It's normal for teens to go through some changes as they mature but pay attention if you notice changes to her mood, behavior, energy level, or appetite. Likewise, take note if he stops wanting to do things that used to make him happy, or if you notice him isolating himself. If you see a change in your teen's daily ability to function, ask her about it and be supportive (without being judgmental). She may need your help and it could be a sign she needs to talk to a mental health professional.



THE TIME BETWEEN HEARING THE EXCUSES & DISCUSSING HONESTLY.



How to Talk to Your Teen About Substance Use

Research shows that clear rules help keep kids safe

Rae Jacobson

Reprinted with permission from The Child Mind Institute (<https://childmind.org/>).

Adolescence is a tricky time. Teenagers are just beginning to establish their identities, and this often means testing the limits of parental controls. When it comes to drugs and alcohol, pushing the boundaries can lead to dangerous territory.

Setting clear rules about substance use helps give teens the structure they need to stay safe. Let's be realistic: You can't guarantee that your rules won't be broken. But research shows that kids who have clear rules are less likely to get into serious trouble than kids who don't. Even when the rules are broken, teens whose parents have clearly outlined what is and isn't acceptable are less likely to run to extremes and more likely to make safer choices.

So you need to have the talk, but for a lot of parents initiating a potentially difficult conversation is daunting. A few guidelines can help get the ball rolling and make for a smoother, more productive experience for all.

Plan to have the talk

Springing a serious conversation on your teenager can make her feel ambushed and defensive. Give her a heads up before hand and make sure to be clear about what the conversation will entail, so everyone can be on the same page. "Tomorrow night let's have a talk about drinking alcohol. You're not in trouble. I just want to talk about where we stand and hear any concerns you might be having."

Spell out the rules

Clearly spell out your rules and the specific consequences of breaking them. Avoiding ambiguity lets your teen know where you stand, and research shows that kids tend to be safer when parents set limits. And for teens who are being pressured to do something they aren't comfortable with, it can make it easier for them if they know they can use their parents as an excuse for saying no.

Explain your reasons

Be very clear about your reasons for prohibiting alcohol use. Teenagers are often ordered to do things without being given a clear reason why and by explaining yourself you're inviting them to have a more open, adult conversation.

The potential consequences of drinking are real. Any kind of experimentation is illegal when you're a teenager, and it's dangerous. Be honest and rational. Obviously, some illegal substances are more dangerous than others. But any substance can be harmful: one beer is intoxicating but 10 beers could be deadly.

And any substance use impairs

judgment and teens are more likely to find themselves in problematic and potentially dangerous. It can affect them in school, too. If they get caught it could go on their record—something they won't want when they're applying to colleges—and if they play sports they could be cut from the team.

Obey the golden rule

Speak to your teens the way you'd like to be spoken to. Teenagers are acutely sensitive to condescension, and it's important to remember that at the end of the day they are the ones who will make the final decisions. Treat them like the adults you want them to become. By showing respect you're modeling good behavior and letting them know you expect them to act responsibly, not just for your sake, but for their own as well.

Let them speak

Give kids a chance to express their concerns and feelings. They may have been hoping for a chance to ask questions or check in about something troubling. Opening an equal, active dialogue will increase the chances that your teen will feel comfortable being honest with you in the future.

The ‘I learned it from you, Dad,’ dilemma

Parents sometimes feel hypocritical hiding their own experiences. If your daughter asks if you’ve ever drunk alcohol before age 21, you can choose to keep your experiences private (not everything in your history needs to be available to your kids) or to share them, but don’t reminisce or otherwise glamorize your experiences. You can also explain that as a parent, it’s your job to help them avoid things they will regret, and underage drinking definitely increases the chances of doing something you will regret.

Conditional amnesty

What we want, first and foremost, is for kids to be safe. Being open and honest with your teens about alcohol encourages them to reciprocate. One way to create safeguards for your teen is to have an “amnesty policy.”

In an amnesty situation, your child can call and ask for help without incurring the regular repercussions she might if she’d tried to hide her behavior. Amnesty policies keep kids safe and encourage them to make appropriate choices without letting them off the hook.

For example: If your daughter (or her designated driver) is drunk at a party and she wants to leave, she can call you and ask for a ride or cab fare instead of putting herself at risk. She’d then be allowed to come home and go to bed without yelling or grounding. In the morning you and she could have a talk about her drinking and safety.

An ongoing conversation

Talking to your teen about substance abuse should be a process, not a single event. Risk factors for substance use can change and multiply as teenagers weather the trials and pressures of adolescence. Keep an eye out for changes in your child’s mood and demeanor, shifting peer groups, and other signs that it might be time to check in about their safety and your expectations.

Make sure they know your conversation is an open-ended one, and that it’s two-way street — “I’m going to be checking in with you about this sometimes, and if you have any questions or concerns you can always ask me, too.” Keeping the lines of communication open will help you and your teenager feel engaged and safe during a potentially turbulent time.



THE TIME BETWEEN SERVING DINNER & CLEARING THE DISHES.



Family Dinner: Does It Matter?

The art of staying in touch with teenagers

Harold S. Koplewicz, MD

Reprinted with permission from The Child Mind Institute (<https://childmind.org/>).

For some years now, we've been told that teenagers who sit down to family dinner every day are more likely to do well in school and less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol or get into trouble with the law.

It's a piece of conventional parenting wisdom that has been honored, guiltily, in the breach in many households with two working parents and children with intense schedules of activities.

It's been backed up by dozens of studies reinforcing the importance of regular sit-down dinners in keeping kids firmly in the parental orbit. There are whole books and web sites devoted to promoting closeness and sharing family values over home-cooked meals, rather than scarfing prepared food on the fly.

But a recent study purports to show that those *de rigueur* dinners may have been overrated.

A pair of researchers at Cornell and the University of Minnesota took a close look at data from interviews with some 18,000 adolescents, as well as their parents, over a period of several years, about their home lives and their well-being. Turns out that the long-touted importance of family dinners fades if you take into account other aspects of the families' home life: whether there were two parents in the home, whether parents and kids did things together like go to movies, whether parents helped kids with homework, whether there was parental monitoring in the form of rules and curfews.

As they write in the *New York Times*:

(www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/opinion/sunday/is-the-family-dinner-overrated.html?_r=1&hpw)

To give an example: without controlling for such factors, we found that 73 percent of adolescents who seldom ate with their families (twice per week) reported drug and alcohol use, compared with 55 percent of those who ate with their families regularly (seven days a week). But controlling for these factors, the gap was cut in half, from 18 percentage points to 9.

Furthermore, when the researchers compared data from interviews with the same kids a year later and then again when they were young adults, the effects just didn't persist.

So what's the verdict on family dinner? None of this changes the fact that it's a good way for parents to give kids undivided attention and tune into what they are doing and thinking. Regular meals together keep everyone in the habit of touching base and sharing information—even if not everyone is in the mood to do it. But it's not by any means the only time or place to do those things.

The *Times* piece also mentioned a recent survey that asked teenagers when, other than over dinner, they talked to their parents about their lives. The vast majority said in the car. I can't tell you the number of times that my wife or I have been surprised by hearing (or overhearing) something important from one of my kids while driving them somewhere. Talk in the car is informal and unplanned, which takes pressure off by lowering expectations, and, until smart phones became ubiquitous, it tended to be uninterrupted by intrusions from other parties.

The point is, it isn't the particular ritual of family dinner that has such an important influence on kids, but the habit of staying connected, and both talking to and listening to your kids on a daily basis. Even if you don't do family dinner, you should still expect your kids to talk to you. Expect to know about their lives, who their friends are, what they're happy about, and what's bothering them. Expect them to continue to do things with you: go to a movie, share a meal at a restaurant, take a hike, go shopping, play tennis-whatever you (and they) like to do. Those expectations will help keep kids in your orbit.

Teenagers are torn by their need for independence and their need for clear, close authority figures, even if they may not seem all that eager for the closeness, or the authority. Dinner may be overrated, but attention isn't: Parents who rarely slow down enough to actually listen, or are chronically distracted when they're at home, send a message to kids that they're not a high priority. So, whether it's breaking bread together or watching a TV show together (another increasingly rare shared pastime), find a regular activity that's a good way for your family to get the conversation started, and keep it going.

