

PARENTING

Through the Teen Years

"I'm taking the car now. See you later."

High school students love their independence! Here are tips to foster that independence in your teen, while still setting limits and helping him grow into a responsible adult.



Allow options

Let your teen make his own decisions, within boundaries. For example, rather than assigning chores, you can post a job board on the refrigerator and ask him to sign up for at least two a week. Instead of dictating homework time, have him decide whether after school or after dinner works best for him. Allowing him to make his own choices will build his confidence and teach him responsibility, too.



Know her friends

You may know your child's schedule, but not all her friends. Let her invite several to dinner, or suggest that she throw a pizza party over the weekend. You'll get to see who your teen is hanging out with and also how she interacts with other kids.

Choose your battles

Try to focus on the major issues that are important to your high schooler's well-being. Before getting into a fight with him, ask yourself, "Is there a good reason to be upset about this?" While his wild new haircut may surprise you, you probably want to concentrate more on his overall behavior and attitude toward school.

Attend events

They may not always show it, but teens still want you by their side at important events. Add your high schooler's activities (band concerts, theater performances, games, award ceremonies) to your calendar, and attend when you can. These events provide the chance for you to take pride in his accomplishments and let him know you care.

Communicate creatively

Think about new ways to talk with your teenager. Consider going on a day trip to a favorite place or setting aside weekend time to plan a summer vacation together. Take extra time to chat at the dinner table, after a game, or on the way to activities. Through casual conversations, you'll learn about your child's interests and goals—and perhaps get an opportunity to help with her daily challenges.



Set limits

Teenagers need limits to balance against their increasing freedoms. You'll want to set guidelines for curfew,

driving privileges, and dating. Discuss your rules, and lay out consequences ahead of time for breaking them. Try to make the consequence fit the rule. *Example:* Your teen loses use of the car for bringing it home late.

Encourage safe dating

Your high schooler seems to be spending all her free time with her boyfriend. You're concerned that they're spending too much time together. Instead of a lecture, try a different approach.

Encourage your teenager to include her boyfriend in family events, such as game night. She'll see that having a boyfriend doesn't mean she can't also enjoy family—and you'll be providing a safe way for them to be together.

Listen carefully

If your teen opens up about school or friends, try not to cast judgment or react negatively. Be glad he's talking to you! As he speaks, make eye contact, and avoid distractions like the phone, computer, or kitchen chores. Focus on listening to his words and following up on what he says, rather than using his talk time to plan what you want to say next.

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Help with study skills

High school means more projects and papers, which may be overwhelming to your teenager. Show her how to break down a long-term project into smaller parts. Let her practice making an oral presentation in front of you at home. You might look for a study skills course at your local library or community center to help her improve her work.

Watch the Web

Although the Internet has wonderful resources, it raises a potential red flag for teenagers. Teach your child to protect his privacy if he uses social networking sites such as *myspace.com* or *facebook.com*. Check on sites he's visiting, and make sure he doesn't give out any identifying information (name, age, school, address, city). Consider purchasing an inexpensive software program, such as CyberPatrol or Safe Eyes, that can block your teen's access to inappropriate Web sites.

And make rules about the amount of time your child is allowed to spend on the Internet.



Discuss risky behavior

Talk to your high schooler regularly about alcohol and drugs. Together, look up information (a good place to start is <http://teens.drugabuse.gov>). Discuss the peer pressure she may face ("Oh, come on. Just try it!"), and brainstorm ways to respond (say, "No, thanks," and walk away). Let your child know she can talk to you about this any-time. Also, consider offering her a way out: If she's at a party with drugs or alcohol, tell her she can call you for a ride home at any time, no questions asked.

Give guidance

Disagreements between parents and adolescents are normal, but when conflicts arise, it's a good idea to stay calm and think before you speak. Ask your child specific questions about his friends or his weekend plans, and express concern about unsupervised events. Teens are developing their own identities, but they still need your guidance.

Lessen stress

Sports, rigorous classes, jobs, and social activities make for a busy schedule for most teens. Look for signs of too much stress (headaches, irritability), and offer to help your teenager balance her schedule. Encourage her to leave time for fun activities or just relaxing. Have her chart her time for a week and see where she can make changes.

DECLARING INDEPENDENCE

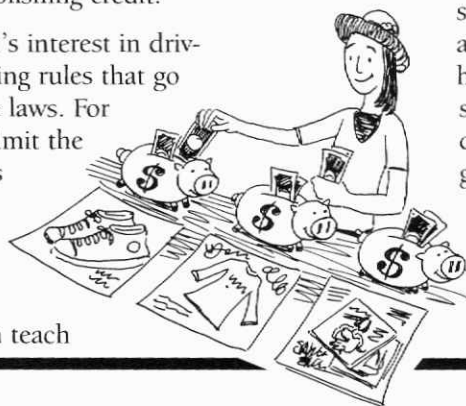
Teens may act as if they're ready to take on the world, but you still have lots to teach them. Here are strategies that will help your child with the transition from high school to life on her own:

- Pass along money management skills, such as how to balance a checkbook, pay bills, and start a savings account. Also, with credit cards being offered to more young adults, teens need to know the benefits as well as the consequences of establishing credit.
- Support your child's interest in driving, but consider setting rules that go beyond motor vehicle laws. For example, you might limit the number of passengers he can take, restrict cell phone use while driving, or place limits on night driving. Also, you can teach

responsibility and safety by having your teen fill the tank regularly, take the car for tune-ups, and learn to change a tire.

- Suggest that your teenager get a part-time job. Working will improve her self-esteem and give her experience for the future. Help her find a good match, and make sure the job does not take away from schoolwork and time with friends.

- Encourage your teen to stay involved in sports, volunteer work, and after-school clubs. These activities can keep him interested in school and the community, build good character traits, and help him maintain healthy behaviors.



High School Years