



Talking Together Makes a Difference

Young Minds

New research indicates that even though the teen brain is full-size, the part of the brain needed for good judgment and decision-making is not fully developed until age 25. Teens need ongoing guidance and involvement from their parents or guardians to help make healthy choices.

Parents and Guardians Can Help Limit the Risks Teenagers Take

Teens that are supervised and have clear rules and values from their parents or guardians are less likely to try risky behaviors. Risky choices for teens include driving too fast, drinking alcohol, trying cigarettes or drugs and having casual sex. Poor decisions can lead to traffic crashes, fights, criminal activity, preventable infectious diseases and injuries. Helping teens stay out of trouble may seem hard, but it's worth it and they will thank you someday.

Remember...

- Parents do make a difference. Teens act like they're not listening, but they still look up to parents more than anyone else, even boyfriends, girlfriends or the media.
- Teens need their parents. They are starting to make their own choices, but they will make mistakes. Setting limits is part of being a parent.
- Kids copy parents. "Do as I say, not as I do" won't work. Kids are watching, listening and learning from your behavior. Act the way you want your children to act because they will copy your good and bad habits.
- "The talk" can't wait. It's often hard for teens and parents to relate to each other, so start to talk before hormones are raging and emotions run high. A good way to get close to your children is to tell them you love them and you want to help them avoid mistakes that can hurt themselves and others.
- Don't be afraid to repeat messages. Kids may roll their eyes, but they really are listening.

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Talking to Teens – Tips for Parents

Listen. Really listen.

- Show your children you are interested in talking to them by stopping what you are doing. Sit down together.
- Set guidelines for good communication. Say there will be no yelling. Allow each person to finish what he or she is saying before jumping in with comments.

Stay on track.

- Say “Did that answer your question?” or “Do you want to know anything else?” or “Does that make sense?”
- When you don’t know an answer, say “I’m not sure, but I’ll find out.”

Use teachable moments.

- Watch TV with your kids, listen to their music and invite their friends to your home. Look for chances to start a 10-minute talk a few times a week. This lets your child know you are interested and ready to talk.
- Discuss media messages as a way to share your values.

Avoid roadblocks.

- Ordering: “You must” or “You have to”
- Threatening: “You’d better...or else”
- Judging: “You are wrong” or “You’re being stupid”

Being a parent can be rewarding as well as very tough. You can meet the challenge of raising your child and enjoy the pre-teen and teen years! Keep the doors of communication open. Continue to talk with your child. You’ll feel good about it and you will stay closer.



Sexual Health

Who should talk to teens about sex?

Parents should take the time to talk with their kids about love, sex and values. Recent surveys show that parents and teens agree they should talk to each other about sex and values.

Know the facts before you talk about sex.

- Thirty-one percent of young women get pregnant at least once before they turn 20.
- One in three sexually active adolescents will graduate from high school with a sexually transmitted disease (STD).
- Chlamydia and gonorrhea are sexually transmitted diseases that can cause sterility (the inability to have babies). In Anne Arundel County, 42 percent of those diagnosed with chlamydia are age 15-19 and 27 percent of those diagnosed with gonorrhea are age 19 and under.
- In Anne Arundel County, infant mortality is high among mothers under age 20. Being a teen parent is risky for the mother and her baby.
- Use of drugs and alcohol can lead to unplanned sex. At least 57 percent of Anne Arundel County high school teens said they drank alcohol and 35 percent said they used drugs.

The Anne Arundel County Department of Health provides free kits for parents on talking to their teen about sex. To order your kit, call the Healthy Teens and Young Adults Program at 410-222-4468 or visit us online at www.aahealth.org.

Other Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, STD topics: www.cdc.gov/std
National Women’s Health Information Center, Birth Control Methods: www.womenshealth.gov/faq/birthcont.htm

For information from the Anne Arundel County Department of Health, go to www.aahealth.org or call the Healthy Teens and Young Adults Program at 410-222-4468.



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