

Parent Pages

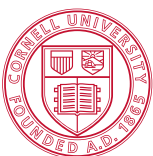
Parenting Teens—What Is the Latest Research?

Recently, researchers have learned a lot about how parents can encourage healthy development among teens. Here is some of what they have found:

- It is important for parents to know some key information about their teenager, such as where their teenager is, what their teenager is doing and who they are doing it with. This is known as parental monitoring.
- However, we know from research that a big part of what parents know about their teens' activities comes from what the teen shares with parents! So a large part of how and what parents are able to monitor when it comes to their teen's friends and activities is a result of what the teen tells his or her parents and not what the parents find out on their own.
- Parents cannot force teens to tell them these things, though. This is because teenagers decide how much information to tell parents about their activities and behavior. In fact, during the teenage years it is natural for teens to engage in “information management” by limiting what they tell their parents. This is healthy in that it helps teens develop their personalities, gain some privacy, and develop strong relationships with their friends.
- Parents can think carefully about what information they need to know, and what information they accept that their teen keep private, remembering that it is natural for teens not to want to tell parents everything. Parents can talk to their teenagers about what information they need to know and why they need to know it, while also letting their teen know that they understand the need to keep some things to themselves.

- Teens are more likely to share information with their parents when the parent-teen relationship is a warm and supportive one. When teens have close and caring relationships with their parents they tend to share more details about their activities with their parents. This leads to parents having greater knowledge about teens' friends and whereabouts. And research also tells us that teens who share more details with their parents tend to engage in fewer antisocial behaviors.
- Parents can encourage teens to share the information that they need to know by creating an open and positive relationship with their teen. This can be done in a number of ways:
 - One good way to do this may be with a family meeting, in which both parents and teens can talk about what they would like to share and why. In such a meeting, it is important to listen and respect each other's viewpoint.
 - Being involved in the teen's life; doing things together that both of you enjoy.
 - Helping your teen feel comfortable talking with you by listening, not reacting negatively when they do share something, and letting the teen talk when he or she is ready.
 - Remembering that sharing is a two-way street. If you are open with your teen he or she is more likely to be open with you.
 - Treating your teen the way you would like to be treated by communicating with respect for their opinions and by explaining the reasons for the rules that you make when your teen perceives a rule as being unfair. If you are firm but fair in your parenting, your teen will respond to this better than if you are harsh.

Balancing your need for information against your teen's desire for privacy is difficult, but important. Recent research points to strategies that parents can use to make this easier. Using these strategies will help parents gain more information about their teen's activities and whereabouts in a manner that is respectful to a teen's sense of independence and need for privacy. When teens are willing to share more information, parents are more able monitor teens' behavior.



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