

Does My Teen Come with an Instruction Manual?

By Deb Landry

Like a rash; the teen years starts out with a few inflamed areas and spreads out of control like poison ivy. As parents, we get twelve years to prepare and it is never quite enough time in this ever changing world of bullying, sexting, drugs and sex, to mention a few. No matter how small or grandiose the issue, parenting teens is a big job.

As they grow physically, we naturally relinquish control and grant them more freedom, but it is imperative to keep them on a leash so to speak. Loosen up but don't let go, protecting and educating along the way.

Do you ever feel when you talk to your teen, they shut down? In a recent study, psychologists found that the prefrontal cortex does not develop until age 24-25. We finally have an answer to why teens react the way they do, but now what's a parent to do? Individual instruction manuals are not included but maybe this list of general tips will ease the pressure for you and your teen.

A 12-Step Program for Responsible Parenting

1. **Be a positive role model.** The way you act is what your child will model. Practicing good behavior, kindness and compassion will help your teens to mirror your actions. This behavior will result in them being less likely to make bad decisions as teens.
2. **Freedom.** Giving [teens](#) a chance to establish their own identity is essential to helping them to carve their own place in society. Develop an active communication schedule. Dinnertime is the perfect time for nonthreatening daily activity conversation.
3. **Pick your battles.** Choices like alcohol and drug use can be life altering. Yet, a choice in hair color, clothes and music helps them find their identity. Don't believe me? Take a look at your high school pictures.
4. **Know their friends.** Make a point to know who they are hanging out with, their families and invite the kids to hang at your house. When you bridge the gap, you will have the advantage to monitor and observe their interactions.
5. **Set basic boundaries and ground rules.** Very basic: respect, honesty, truth, communication, listening. Mutual respect goes a long way. Set rules about important issues such as driving, sex, drugs, grades, school and friends early. An example: driving is a privilege. In order to have the privilege, grades have to be honor roll (you set the criteria). The rule then becomes clear and goal oriented.
6. **Stay out of the drama circle.** Parents sometimes tend to jump into the drama with the teens. Make sure to keep yourself grounded. Step out of the circle and help to solve the problems, don't be part of it.
7. **Talk to teens about risks.** Whatever the subject, your kids need to know the worst that could happen. Make informed conversation. Get the information and handouts needed to educate yourself and your teen. You may learn together. No

- matter what subject, make a game plan. Driving drunk or being at a party where parents are not at home can be dangerous and harmful. Let them call you with a no questions asked policy. Reward them for their good decisions. Be supportive, and they will tell you what happened.
8. **Always eat dinner together.** The average American family eats a meal together four times a month. Make the switch. Dinner together every night, they will start expecting it and won't want to miss it. For an added bonus, invite their friends.
 9. **Get Help.** Don't be afraid to ask for help. It will provide you relief and assistance. Look at it this way; if your car were making funny noises you'd call your mechanic. If the kids are squealing, ask a friend, parent coach or counselors for some advice.
 10. **Listening.** Listening is one of the most valuable tools in being an informed and involved parent. Listen verbally and with your eyes. Developing a healthy relationship with your child is crucial from birth. Anything less that that will result in problems down the road.
 11. **Consequences.** There are always consequences involved when mistakes are made. The punishment must fit the crime so to speak. Not only that, the consequences should be known up front. Most important, follow through on your plan. If getting a D means getting a tutor, get the tutor.
 12. **Traditions.** Set a family night when everyone has to be home for dinner. Play a board game, go for a hike, and make it a regular family event. You'll soon find that the family will expect it.

Suggested reading: *WHY DO THEY ACT THAT WAY DO?* and *NO: WHY KIDS OF ALL AGES NEED TO HEAR IT AND WAYS PARENTS CAN SAY IT* by David Walsh, Ph. D.

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