



Top Tips for Parenting Teenagers

YOUR GUIDE TO POSITIVE PARENTING

Top Tips for Parenting Teenagers

Top Tips for Parents of Teenagers

Changes To The Law

In September 2006, the law on physical punishment was changed¹. If a parent harms his/her child through physical punishment, the defence of reasonable chastisement will now only be considered if the harm is seen as minor:

Everyone accepts that children must learn right from wrong and develop the ability to get on with others. However, it is important to remember that you do not have a right to physically punish your child and you should, therefore, consider other approaches, such as positive parenting.

Being a parent is a wonderful thing; however, it's not always easy. Hopefully, the information in this booklet will show you how you can use positive parenting techniques to guide, nurture and encourage your child and build your confidence as a parent. Each section includes a very important point (V.I.P.) which should help you to achieve and maintain a strong, loving and respectful relationship with your child.

Parents of children with a disability may face additional challenges and pressures, which are not addressed within this booklet. However, there are details of organisations that may be able to help in the contacts section at the back of this booklet.

¹ Article 2 of the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 restricts the defence of reasonable chastisement to a charge of common assault or a civil claim where the harm alleged does not amount to actual bodily harm.

Top Tips for Parenting Teenagers

Introduction

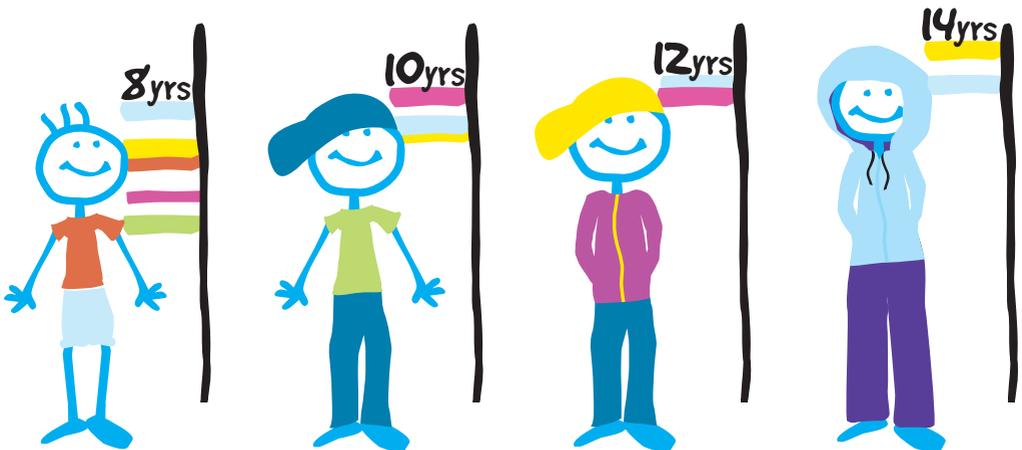
“You think it’s hard now? Wait till they’re teenagers!”

Nowadays it seems that parents of babies and young children are bombarded with advice and help, but parents of teenagers need support too. The teenage years can be challenging, but they can be rewarding too as you watch your child continue to grow and develop as an individual. Family relationships will enter a new and dynamic phase and, at times, you may feel that you are having to work harder to maintain those vital ties with your child. However, ultimately, those ties can be strengthened and it helps if you know and understand what is happening to your child.

One useful way of beginning to understand the teenage years is to remember that change is taking place in almost every area of a young person’s life – their bodies, emotions, social lives and relationships. Many of these changes are connected to physical development and hormone balance, neither of which the teenager can control.

Your relationship with your child will change when your child becomes a teenager, but it doesn’t need to change for the worse and your child still needs to know that you are there for him or her.

If you are patient and keep working at your relationship, you and your teenager will see the benefits.



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Top Tips for Parenting Teenagers

Tips for Helping With Teenager's Behaviour

Communication

Good communication is central to you developing and maintaining a good relationship with your teenager.

Listening to your teenager will encourage them to open up and discuss the issues they face growing up.

Teenagers will learn how to express emotion such as anger or love by seeing how you express your feelings. Remember, you can influence behaviour positively or negatively, by your example.

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Top Tips

- Good communication builds good relationships.
- Keep the lines of communication open at all times.
- Listen to your teenager and try not to interrupt.
- Remember we all communicate through body language - a smile can go a long way.
- Keep calm - when things get heated the message does not get through.
- Talking is good for everyone.



V.I.P

When you are angry your face and tone of voice convey the most meaning. The words you say actually count for very little.

Facial Expression 55%

Tone of Voice 38%

Words 7%

Conflict

Conflict happens in every family. How you deal with it can make all the difference. Be clear and confident and know what you want to say. Angry teenagers can be intimidating, even if they don't mean to be. Your teenager may also feel intimidated by your behaviour.

Everyone gets angry from time to time but you can express your anger without aggression.

If it looks like an argument is about to start, stay calm and try not to get drawn in. Tell them that you care and want to help.

Remember there are people who can help: - family, friends, health visitors, G.Ps, support organisations and groups (some of which are listed at the back of this booklet). Professional help can provide much needed support.



Top Tips

- Ignore small or trivial issues and concentrate on resolving the more important ones.
- After an argument, think about what started it. Was it a one-off or are there issues that are being raised often? What would you do differently if it happens again?
- Pick a good time to talk to your teenager – when everyone is able to listen.
- Be consistent with your decisions.
- Ensure both parents present a united front. You may not agree, but you don't have to say so in front of your teenager! Otherwise you add to the confusion and give your teenager an opportunity to manipulate the situation.

V.I.P.

Work together with your teenager to reach a solution.

Top Tips for Parenting Teenagers

Tips for Helping With Teenager's Behaviour

Rules and Boundaries

Children of all ages need rules, and that goes for teenagers too - even though at this stage they may challenge them a lot!

Telling teenagers what to do doesn't work!

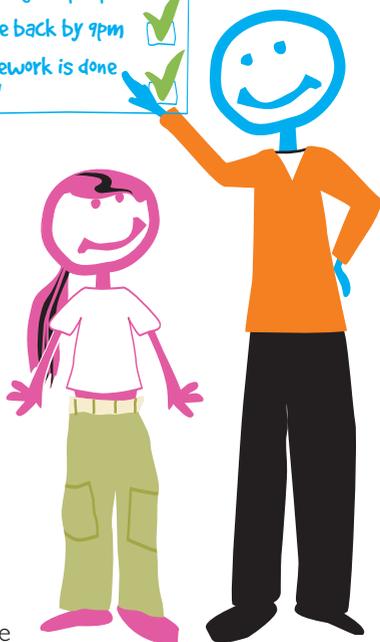
Rules are more likely to be kept if they are negotiated, understood and agreed.

It works better if there are as few rules as possible.

If you can compromise, it will encourage your teenager to compromise too, but be firm about the boundaries that matter.

Heap on the praise when rules are kept, but, if the rules are broken, your teenager needs to know and understand the consequences. Stay calm. Listen to what they have to say. Talk about what went wrong and how it can be avoided next time.

So we will agree that:
You will be back by 9pm
That homework is done before TV



Top Tips

- Rules should be negotiated, understood and agreed.
- There needs to be some 'give and take'.
- Few rules work better.
- Praise when rules are kept.
- Be clear about the consequences of breaking rules.
- Consequences should be fair and realistic.

V.I.P

Renegotiate the rules as your teenager gets older.

Teenage Worries

Teenagers experience many changes and can feel uncertain about everything, from their appearance to who they are going to meet. Some of their worries may seem trivial to you, but to your teenager they can be a big deal, so take them seriously. Remembering the feelings and emotions you had at this age may help you to understand your teenager's concerns.



Building self-esteem in your teenager is key to helping them deal with day-to-day life.

Self-esteem is about being comfortable with yourself. Teenagers need to know that they matter and that other people matter too.

Top Tips

- Don't be over critical.
- Avoid making jokes at your teenager's expense, even if it's meant in a light-hearted way.
- Help your teenager to feel good about him or herself.
- Recognise that it is normal for your teenager to want acceptance.
- If you know your teenager is worried, spend time with him or her and try to sort things out.

V.I.P

Watch out for changes in usual behaviour and take action if you feel your teenager's worries are becoming serious. If you need help, get it.



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Tips for Helping With Teenager's Behaviour

Risky Behaviour

Risky behaviour can take many forms, from smoking to drug taking, heavy drinking, staying out late, inappropriate sexual behaviour or vandalism.

When teenagers get involved in risky behaviour, they may be experimenting or reacting to something that has happened in their lives. Most risky behaviour is short lived but in some circumstances it can lead to more serious problems.

No matter what the issue, your teenager needs your support, understanding and above all love, even though you may be disappointed in their behaviour.

Top Tips

- Discuss what type of behaviour is not acceptable – be clear and consistent.
- Talk about the dangers of risky behaviour with your teenager - keep it factual and try not to lecture!
- Help your teenager to face up to and be responsible for their actions. Make it clear that you are there to support them.
- Encourage them to talk about what they are doing and why. If they don't want to talk to you – try to get them to talk to someone else.
- No matter how tough it gets, stick by your teenager and keep talking.

V.I.P

Never give up on your teenager, even if you need help to keep going.

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Friends

Friends are a big influence on teenagers. However, even if they don't say it or show it your teenager still needs your support, love and guidance.



Teenagers need friends to confide in, to socialise with and to help them shape their identity. The experience of having different friends helps them choose the sort of friends and relationships they want in the future.

Getting to know your teenager's friends helps you to know more about your teenager. Teenagers don't mind parents being interested in their friends – but only so far. So tread carefully! Teenagers are very loyal and protective of friends. It's good to talk about the things you like about their friends. Don't be critical unless there is good reason.



Top Tips

- Get to know your teenager's friends.
- Think before you criticise friends.
- Talk about peer pressure.
- Help your teenager to say 'no'.
- Avoid making quick judgements.
- Give your teenager space with their friends, but make sure they are safe.

V.I.P

Even though you might think a friend of your teenager is 'unsuitable' they may still be OK.



Tips for Helping With Teenager's Behaviour

Skills and Potential

School is a big part of any teenager's life. Each person has his or her own unique abilities – some are academically gifted, others have great people or sporting skills and some are creative – your teenager is no different.

Encourage your teenager to get involved in activities, such as sports, youth groups, music or volunteering. This can help them develop their interests, acquire new skills and make new friends.



When it comes to choosing a career, some teenagers take longer than others and some won't know until their mid-20s! You can help your teenager by giving them as much time as they need to talk through their options. You may feel frustrated that they are taking time to make up their mind.

Remember, a right decision is more important than a quick one.



Top Tips

- Have realistic expectations of your teenager's ability.
- Recognise that teenagers are different and make allowances for this - never compare your teenager to their peers or siblings.
- Praise your teenager's strengths and never dismiss an achievement that your teenager is proud of.
- Remember, good exam grades are beneficial, but there are other options.
- Support your teenager in considering their options – make sure they have as much information as possible.
- Keep yourself up to date about careers – look up information or talk to people about their work experiences.
- Check out the Northern Ireland Careers Service Website (see contacts section), which is full of useful advice and information for you and your teenager.

V.I.P

It is tempting to try and live your dreams through your teenager, but don't do it!



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Letting Go

All teenagers are different. You must, therefore, consider what is right in terms of 'letting go' for your teenager, bearing in mind that the transition to adulthood is a gradual process.

As a parent, you want to keep your child close by, where you know they're safe. That protective instinct will never fade. However, you must give your teenager the space and support to become a confident, independent person and help him or her to acquire the skills and knowledge required for daily life.

Always remember, the journey toward independence can be unpredictable. One moment your teenager may behave like an adult, showing a lot of responsibility, the next they may be more childlike. However, that's perfectly normal.



Top Tips

- Give teenagers greater control and responsibility over their lives as they get older.
- Help teenagers to make safe and sensible decisions about how they live their lives.
- Teenagers need to make their own decisions and, if necessary, their own mistakes.
- Make changes gradually, so that, when the time comes for your teenager to leave home, it will not feel like too much of a loss, for you or your teenager.

V.I.P

Don't neglect any shared interests – spend leisure time together as equals, watch sport or go to the cinema.



Top Tips for Parenting Teenagers

Here Are Some Useful contacts

These are just some of the organisations that you may find useful. Other nearby services can be found listed in your local library or Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Barnardo's Parenting Matters

Support and information for parents including courses on parenting teenagers. **Tel: 028 9049 1081**

www.barnardos.org.uk

Drug and Alcohol coordination Teams (DACTs)

Four covering Northern Ireland can advise on local help and services.

Eastern – 028 9043 4248

Northern – 028 2566 2210/2575

Southern – 028 4066 0982

Western – 028 7186 0086



FASA

Based in north and west Belfast provides services for those who are directly or indirectly affected by drugs, alcohol and other substances. *Parents' Guide to drugs – easy to read help and advice on drugs for parents and guardians.*

www.fasaonline.org

Frank About Drugs

National drugs helpline.

Tel: 0800 776600

www.talktofrank.com

Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland

Help and advice with various areas of health and well-being.

Tel: 028 9031 1611

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk



Love for Life

Information for parents and teenagers. Supports young people in making their own informed choices on alcohol, drugs and sex.

Tel: 028 3882 0553

www.loveforlife.org.uk

Northern Ireland Anti-bullying Forum

Tel: 028 9043 1123

NI careers Service

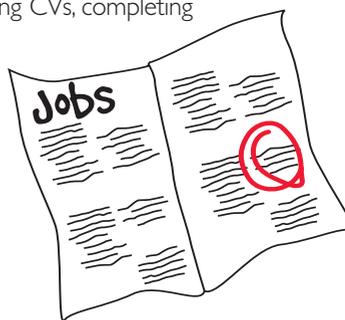
Provides advice and information for you and your teenager on choosing subjects and courses; finding a job (including work experience and voluntary work); getting a job (including developing CVs, completing applications and interview techniques); preparing for student life and obtaining EMAs (Education Maintenance Allowances).

Call into your local office,

Tel: 028 9044 1781

or search online at:

www.careersserviceeni.com



Parents Advice Centre

Helpline, face to face support for parents and parenting courses.

Tel: 0808 8010 722 (Freephone helpline)

Parenting Forum

All parents are encouraged to join – local events, newsletter and support. **Tel: 028 9031 0891**

Young Minds parents' information service

Provides information and advice for anyone with concerns about the mental health of a young person. **Tel: 0800 018 2138**

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Brook

A national voluntary sector provider of free and confidential sexual health advice and services specifically for young people under 25.

Tel: 0800 018 5023 (helpline)
020 7950 7700 (24 hr information line)

ChildLine

ChildLine is the free helpline for children and young people in the UK. Children and young people can call **0800 1111** to talk about any problem and counsellors are always there to help them sort it out.



Contact Youth

Provides face to face counselling to young people in the 11-25 age range throughout Northern Ireland, in community and post primary school settings; post primary pupils can also ask for a referral form from their Pastoral Head or Form Tutor to make an appointment to speak to an independent counsellor in school.

Contact Youth helpline 'Youthline', deals with any concerns (including suicide prevention)

Tel: 0808 808 8000 (24 hr Helpline) Tel: 028 9032 0092

FPA

A sexual health charity. Its purpose is to enable people in the UK to make informed choices about sex and to enjoy sexual health. It works to improve sexual health across the UK.

Tel: 0845 122 8690

There 4 me

An NSPCC online advice resource for children aged 12-16 years old, and worried about issues like abuse, bullying, exams, drugs and self harm.

www.there4me.com

Northern Ireland Sports Council

Sport Northern Ireland aims to make sport happen for you.

Tel: 028 9038 1222 Fax: 028 9068 2757

E-mail: info@sportni.net



Contact a Family

Provides advice, information and support to the parents of children with all disabilities and health conditions.

Freephone Helpline 0808 808 3555

www.cafamily.org.uk

Disability Action

Works to ensure that people with disabilities attain their full rights as citizens by supporting people with disabilities.

Tel: 028 9029 7880

www.disabilityaction.org

Mencap

Works with people with a learning disability and their families and carers.

Tel: 028 9069 1351

Information Service: 0845 7636227

www.mencap.org.uk

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Comments

We are interested in your views about this booklet, so we would like to hear from you -

- Have you found it helpful?
- What in particular has been of help/interest to you?
- What additional information should we consider making available?



Please forward your comments by post to:

'Top Tips for Parents'
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DHSSPS
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Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3SQ

or



by e-mail to: familypolicyunit@dhsspsni.gov.uk

or



by telephone: 028 90 520528

This booklet has been produced by the Inter-disciplinary group on positive parenting.

The Group consists of representatives from: Civil Law Reform Division, DHSSPS, ofMDFM, DENI, Barnardo's NI, NCH, NIPPA, NSPCC NI and Parents Advice Centre.

