

## Teens & Relationships: A Parent's Role

Friendships and belonging to a group of friends are often the highest priorities for teens during the high school years. Teens develop strong social connections through their relationships with peers, and those relationships form the basis of how your teen relates to the world. These friendships teach teens about self-expression, social behavior, and how to apply empathy when dealing with others. High school can be a challenging time for many teens, as popularity, cliques, peer pressure, and bullying can all be a part of their social lives. You can guide your teen and help teach them techniques to recognize and establish functional and healthy relationships.

Help your teen identify their social strengths. Confidence is one of the best tools for overcoming the difficulties of the high school years, and you can nurture your teen's self-esteem by pointing out their social strengths. They may be a good listener, a loyal friend, or a generous and empathetic peer. Remind them that being true to herself or himself is very important and, if they focus on their strengths, they can be more confident when establishing new friendships. This may also be a good time to talk about any social challenges they may be facing, like wanting to fit in with the popular crowd, being made fun of, or not being invited to certain social events. Listen to your teen's concerns or problems and suggest ways that they can make healthy and responsible decisions when confronted by these issues. Also, talk to your teen about peer pressure and bullying—both in-person and online—which can happen regularly in high school.

Monitor your teen's friendships. You are still a strong influence on your teen during the high school years, and this is especially true when it comes to teaching them how to deal with relationships. It's good to encourage your teen's independence and friendships outside the home. Try to get to know their friends and try not to make quick judgments about them. If you have reason to believe that they are falling in with a bad crowd, remind your teen that you understand their need for social acceptance, but that hanging out with the wrong people may endanger them or affect their future. Dr. Maurice Elias, director of the Rutgers Social and Emotional Laboratory, suggests that if you prevent your teen from hanging out with those you deem dangerous, you should explain your reasons why, but don't expect your teen to understand. Elias adds that it's not a parent's job always to make popular decisions, and you have to take action when you think their safety is at stake.

Set limits for your teen's dating life. If you choose to allow your teen to date in high school, establish boundaries for what's appropriate and what's not. For example, if your teen asks to bring their romantic partner over to do homework, you should establish rules on where they can be and what they can do. For instance, they may need to stay in common areas of the home or keep bedroom doors open. You may also want to take a moment to reinforce what you may have already taught them about sexual intimacy and remind them about the need for responsible romantic behavior. Having clear-cut expectations ahead of time is much easier than trying to respond in the moment.

Adapted from: <https://www.today.com/parenting-guides/how-navigate-parent-teen-relationship-t179110>



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