Parent of a Teenager? Read This!

Remember
- Parents are legally responsible for their children until they reach the age of 18.
- Parents cannot fix everything. We can support our children, but sometimes they need to experience the consequences of their actions.
- Most teenagers experiment. They get drunk, come in late, try smoking and do dumb things. Many of us did the same, and some just took a few risks... and learned. That's why we can give good advice, but in the long run it's the example we set and our ability to communicate that will most help our children.
- Tell your teenagers often that you love them and are proud of them — they may not say it back, but they need to know it now more than ever. We need to boost their self-esteem, not tear them down. They may appear outwardly to be confident, but inside they still need our approval and love.

Help and Advice for Parents
- Parentline Plus: 0800 800 2222
- Gamblers Anonymous: 020 7384 3040
- Alcoholics Anonymous: 01904 644026
- The National Drugs Helpline: 0800 776600
- Samaritans: 0845 795 9595
- Youth Access: 01285 673630
- Children's Legal Centre: 01202 578000
- Advisory Council for Education: 020 7354 3333
- Education Otherwise: 0891 318301
- Quitline (smoking): 0800 002 2000

Free Booklets
For free booklets about child protection, bullying or child abuse, send a large SAE to:
- Kidscape, 2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH, tel.: 020 7730 3300
- www.kidscape.org.uk

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PARENTS CAN HELP

The bottom line is that we are parents with rights and responsibilities for our children. We must follow our intuition and use common sense to keep our children safe regardless of what anyone else tells us. Parents seeking advice are sometimes told that their teenagers are now "grown-up" and that parents can do nothing. This isn’t true. Start with a few basic steps - try to:

- find a quiet time to talk with teenagers about how things are going - not after a row or as they are going out or it won’t work. Sit down together; give them a chance to talk. Don’t make it formal - this isn’t the Spanish Inquisition. Do listen. It is worth the effort to find out their viewpoints and concerns.
- encourage your teenager to talk to other trusted adults such as teachers, aunts, uncles, grandparents or family friends.
- sometimes kids just don’t want to discuss things with parents! That’s normal.
- notice when they do something right.
- ensure that they know how to keep safe. Teenagers take risks and think they are invincible but we know they’re not. Suggest that they:
  - know what to do if they miss their lift home. Tell them to ring you (or a friend or neighbour) no matter what the hour and you will arrange for them to get home safely. Better than a walk home in the dark.
  - know the number of a friend or a local taxi service as a back-up.
  - carry change for the phone and a phone card or a phone charge card - these are programmed for your number only, but watch out for the bills!
  - come home with friends at night - never alone. Take a route that is likely to be busy-not isolated.
  - ring if they are going to be late.
  - arrange a secret code with you so they can ring if they need help. For example, they call and say "Has Lisa rung?" That is your cue to ring back in a few minutes and arrange to collect them.
  - sit on the lower deck of double deck buses late at night or near the guard on the underground.
  - never never get in a car with a driver who is drunk.
  - never never hitchhike.

- stand up as a parent and don’t be afraid to say No. Let your child use you as an excuse to keep out of trouble - "My (terrible) parents won’t let me” will elicit sympathy from friends and a secret sigh of relief from your child in dangerous situations. Keep your standards - help them set their limits.

- remind yourself that when they blunder, it’s probably not your fault. Teenagers will explore, make mistakes and gain their independence. Just think of all the mistakes we made!
- remember that your teenager still loves and needs you, but might not be able to show it just now. Don’t take things personally. It is a phase. It does get better!
- show an interest in what they do, but don’t try to be their best friend - give them space and privacy as long as they aren’t being self-destructive.
- be tolerant. Teenage humour seems to include bawling loudly, passing wind, screeching in public, telling horrible sick jokes all while listening to a personal stereo. Charming! Try to ignore small things - they’ll outgrow most. Save your energy for issues which really matter.
- be understanding and supportive when they feel isolated from the "in crowd". It is difficult to be different if they have other interests or if everyone else is smoking or taking drugs.
- explain in advance the consequences which will follow if they do something wrong. Then follow-through.
- be flexible. Let’s say a teenager comes home drunk and is sick all night. Maybe the consequences of this are a better lesson than anything you could do!
- use humour as much as possible - it will save your sanity. (Burr back at them!)