

## Parenting Teens in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Adolescent Brain Development

Brain remodeling happens intensively during adolescence, continuing into the mid/late-20s. Adolescence marks the **maturing** of important executive function skills like problem solving, critical thinking, planning, and impulse control.

Brain changes establish the following shifts in how teens think, feel and interact with others:

- **Novelty seeking:** increased reward-seeking and desire to try new things.
- **Social engagement:** increased drive for social connection leading to friendship.
- **Increased emotional intensity**
- **Creative exploration:** increased use of abstract reasoning leading to new and innovative ideas.

### Risk Taking

Risk taking is necessary for adolescent development. It helps a teen shape their identity, try out new decision making skills, and develop realistic assessments of themselves, other people and the world. However, many teens struggle to override the circuitry that leads to more impulsive or risk taking behaviours. Teens need help staying safe while also being allowed to engage in healthy risk taking.

### Parenting Risk Taking Adolescents

- Avoid “over-functioning” your teens (doing too much for them)
- Give teens space to make choices, make mistakes and come up with their own answers
- Casually model rational decision-making strategies
- Help teens learn to feel their feelings, and choose their actions
- Teach and model the “3 P’s”: practice, patience and perseverance
- Give teens opportunities to practice reasoning and decision making
- Teach teens about their brain development and how it impacts their behavior

### Tips for Talking with Teens

- Discuss, don’t lecture
- Listen lots! Listen non-judgmentally
- Avoid “why” questions
- Use non-threatening questions
- Ask open-ended questions
- Match adolescent’s emotional state, unless it is hostile. Reflecting helps a person feel understood.

**Love and Connect:** Offer support and acceptance while affirming your teen’s increasing maturity.

- Watch for moments to express genuine affection, respect, and appreciation for your teen.
- Expect increased criticism and debate. Strengthen your skills for discussing ideas and disagreeing in ways that respect both your teen’s opinions and your own.
- Treat your teen as a unique individual distinct from siblings, stereotypes, his or her past, or your own past.
- Provide meaningful roles for your teen in the family
- Spend time together one-on-one and as a family.
- Practice positive touch

**Monitor and Observe:** Let teens know you are paying attention.

- Keep track of your teen’s whereabouts
- Keep in touch with other adults in teen’s life
- Stay informed about academics, activities and acquaintances
- Learn about and watch for warning signs (i.e. anxiety, distress, mental health problems)
- Evaluate the challenge level of teen activities
- Respect teen’s privacy

**Consult and Advocate:** Provide continual support for decision making and a network of caring adults.

- Set a good example (i.e. risk-taking, healthy habits, emotional control)
- Express your personal positions on issues (i.e. ethical, moral, social, political)
- Model healthy adult relationships
- Answer teens’ questions/help get information
- Network within the community for support

### Respectful Limit Setting

Teens question and test limits; it is part of their developmental process – but they still need boundaries and limits set to uphold control and maintain values. The goal and challenge for parents is to create limits while still respecting and promoting teens’ decision making and problem solving skills.

**Guide and Limit:** Uphold clear boundaries while encouraging increased competence.

- Set limits in ways that acknowledge and encourage teens’ decision-making and problem-solving skills
- Combine rules and expectations with respect and responsiveness (firmness and flexibility).

### Prioritize Rules

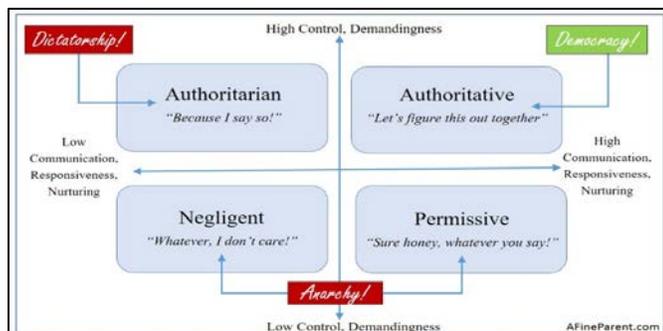
A family gets to decide what rules are important to them. Adults need to consider how far they are willing to bend to teens' desire for independence and freedom. Prioritizing rules will give you and your teen a chance to practice negotiating and compromising.

- Be clear and concise about rules and consequences
- Communicate high, but realistic expectations
- Avoid ultimatums
- Notice and praise when rules are followed
- Follow through. Bend rules rarely
- Harness the power of natural consequences
- Use logical consequences whenever possible
- Choose battles and ignore smaller issues in favor of more important ones.
- Always share the 'why' behind the rule
- Where appropriate, let your teen make choices around rules and consequences
- Renegotiate responsibilities and privileges in response to your teen's changing abilities and growing maturity.

### Discipline, Don't Punish

- Discipline is about teaching, not punishing or controlling your teen.
- Punishment separates; Discipline teaches and points to relationship and reconciliation
- Reprimand your teen's behavior — not Raising Teens: Five Basics for Parenting Adolescents. MIT WorkLife Center 2010
- your teen
- Don't be sarcastic, demeaning, disrespectful or dysregulated
- Don't embarrass or shame
- Avoid disciplining kids when they (or you) are hungry or tired
- Be respectful (explanatory, clear and genuine, encouraging, regulated, build up, be hopeful)

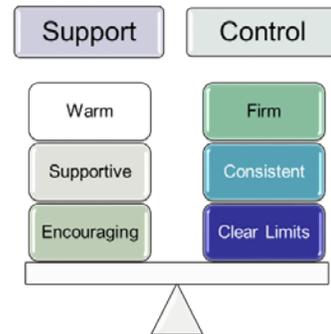
### Parenting Styles



- Uninvolved:** "Kids will be kids- they'll figure it out"
- Permissive:** "I trust you'll do the right thing"
- Authoritarian:** "I'm the boss. You'll do as I say"
- Authoritative:** "I care and I'll give you the freedom you earn; but for safety related issues – you'll do as I say"

### Common Effects of Authoritative Parenting Style on Children/Youth:

- Develop positive relationships – more social, friendly and cooperative
- Does better academically
- Emotional stability
- Alcohol & illicit drug use is lower
- Self-assertive and confident
- Self-motivated
- Independent and competent



### Resources

- Video: Kristina Kuzmic – "Teenagers!" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyaSRC6f>
- Video: Dan Siegel – "The Adolescent Brain" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O1u5OEc5eY&t=3s>
- Video: "Insight Into the Teenage Brain" (TEDTalk): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWUkW4s3XxY>
- Videos: "When Teenagers Break the Rules" from raisingchildren.net.au (Australian website) <https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/behaviour/behaviour-management-ideas/rule-breaking-options>
- Book: *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*. Dan Siegel (2013).
- Website: Raising Teens Project <https://hr.mit.edu/static/worklife/raising-teens/>
- Book: *Why do they act that way? A survival guide to the adolescent brain for you and your teen*. David Walsh. (2005).
- Book: *Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries about the Teenage Brain Tell Us about Our Kids*. Barbara Strauch (2004).
- Book: *Teen Brain, Teen Mind: What Parents Need to Know to Survive the Adolescent Years*. Dr. Ron Clavier (2009).
- Book: *Kids are worth it. Raising resilient, responsible, compassionate kids*. Barbara Coloroso. (2010).
- Book: *How to talk so teens will listen and listen so teens will talk*. Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish. (2006).