



Tipsheet: Improving Your Relationship with Your Teen

- **Don't give up.**
Don't panic if things get rocky with your teen. She/he may be having trouble; it doesn't mean she/he is going off the deep end. If you pay attention, you should be able to tell if the situation gets serious.
- **Don't give in.**
Even if your teen is persistent, it is important to stand your ground. Teens excel at pushing and testing limits. Make your expectations clear and consistent.
- **They are not adults yet.**
The area of the brain responsible for good decision making is one of the last areas to mature; the ability to plan ahead and resist impulses is not fully developed until 20 years of age.
- **Always ask who, what, where and when.**
Asking questions ensures your teen's behavior is thoughtful rather than impulsive. Develop the expectation that you want to know who, what, where and when, and your teen will begin to respond.
- **Asking is trusting.**
Asking questions does not mean you don't trust your teen, even if she/he says it does. Get to know your teen's friends and their parents.
- **Encourage activities and new experiences.**
Motivating teens is difficult. They need to be encouraged. Expose teens to new experiences even if they say they aren't interested.
- **Limit teen isolation.**
Social interaction is critical to mental and physical development. Building friendships reinforces socialization skills and prepares teens to make good decisions in life.
- **Listen and believe in them.**
Listen to teens without judgment. Ask them what works and respect their ideas and opinions.
- **Build positive and negative currencies.**
Work with your teen to create rewards and punishments for positive and negative behaviors. Put power into your teen's hands and hold her/him accountable for her/his decisions. If a teen behaves negatively, enforce the consequences your teen established. For positive behavior, give your teen a chance to cash in her/his positive currency.

Source: David Walsh, Ph.D., author of *Why Do They Act That Way?*; Cathryn Nissen, director of youth development, Project for Pride Living, Minneapolis; Mary Anderson, program director, Lutheran Social Service; Barbara Strauch, author of *The Primal Teen*.

Resources: [United Way 2-1-1™](#) is a free and confidential, 24-hour information/referral line that can connect you to helpful programs and resources in our community. Just dial 2-1-1 or 651-291-0211.