Ten Mistakes Parents Make with Teens

1. Lecture Rather Than Discuss
We want our teens to grow into responsible adults able to make decisions. Provide guidance in a more adult manner, with discussion, negotiation, and understanding of the conflicting needs of maturing teens. Teens need the safety of the home and knowledge that the parents are there, but not suffocating control of an overprotective despot.

2. Ignore the Obvious
Our teens are suddenly sleeping late, missing classes, missing curfew, not introducing new friends, and we write it off as “normal teen behavior.” Don’t wait until the situation is urgent before having a conversation with your teen.

3. Not Following Through on Rules and Consequences
If you set rules, it is important to make clear in advance the consequences for breaking that rule. If you do not enforce the consequences you set for a broken rule, your teen has just learned that getting away with breaking the rules is really a piece of cake.

4. Setting Unreasonable Goals
Make sure that when you set goals, they are attainable. Set expectations that allow the child to succeed based on his or her abilities. If your child needs academic help, find out about tutoring and extra teacher help.

5. Pointing Out Only the Negative, Expecting Only the Positive
There is nothing that encourages a child more than the positive feedback of a parent. This is not to say you should jump up and down with joy just because your child didn’t skip class this week. If you set consequences for bad behavior, the reward is getting to do the things they normally enjoy. Think of it this way: When you show up at your job every day your boss doesn’t praise you for being there; he pays you your wages as he or she normally would.

6. Leaving the Educating up to “Someone Else”
Assuming your child will learn about the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and other risky behaviors at school or elsewhere is a risky assumption. Kids whose parents talk to them about high-risk behaviors and who set clear guidelines about the consequences for engaging in these behaviors are less likely to smoke, drink, use drugs, or have sex.

7. Giving Up on Family Time - Too Much of a Hassle
Family time is essential. Setting family time aside every day to eat together and talk is one of the best defenses against negative peer influences on your teens. Make time for your children on a daily basis to keep communication open. Parents who spend time with their children will be more aware of changes in their demeanor and behavior.

8. Assume Good Grades Mean No Other Problems
A smart kid who does well in school may be able to maintain good grades even though they are drinking or using drugs. Don’t write off other signs of trouble just because the grades are not slipping.

9. Not Taking the Time to Know What Is Up with Adolescents Today
Teens are different every generation. They have different music and other cultural influences. It is a good idea to know the Internet and other cultural influences that may impact your child and impact their decision making. One of the best ways to keep a close eye on these influences is to put computers in common areas.

10. Giving Up Too Soon: Forgetting the “Three Times” Rule
Most teens who have already figured out creative ways to get what they want will not “buckle down” after one attempt to change their behavior, especially if you have backed down on consequences consistently for a period of time. Be consistent.

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