

# 16 Tools for Effective Parents

Being the parent of a child between ages 10 and 14 is no easy task! Parents, as well as the children themselves, must get used to the youth's rapidly changing bodies, mood swings, growing independence, and challenges to authority. No one trick or technique will work for every parent or with every young person. This fact sheet offers ideas to (a) help build positive relations between parents and youth, and to (b) deal with problems when they arise.

## Build a positive relationship

■ **1. Listen for feelings.** When your child comes to you with a problem or when he or she expresses strong feelings, it helps to say something like, "Sounds like you're feeling..." It helps him or her to know that you are trying to understand.

*Example: Your son comes home after school and says, "The teacher yelled at me today." You might say, "Sounds like you were embarrassed."*

■ **2. Remember preteen and teen development.** Your child is going through many changes. Growing independence and challenges to authority are normal. At this age, most youth want to be independent, spend more time with friends, and more time by themselves. Sassing and back talk are normal even though you will probably want to let your child know that it is unacceptable.

*Example: If it bothers you that your child doesn't want to spend as much time with you, remember that this is normal and healthy. Occasionally, schedule time for you*

*and your child, or the whole family, to have fun together.*

■ **3. Notice good behavior.** Make praise specific and frequent. Young people learn better from positive actions (encouragement and extra privileges) than from negative ones (punishment or losing privileges).

*Example: If your child does a good job mowing the lawn, you might say, "The lawn looks really good. You trimmed around the trees and put the mower away. Thanks for doing such a good job."*

■ **4. Give a reward.** Use special privileges and one-on-one time to reward good behavior.

*Example: If your son has argued over chores in the past, but this week follows through and gets everything done, you might let him stay up later on the weekend, have a friend over, or take a trip with you for ice cream or a soda.*

■ **5. Plan time for family fun.** Time spent doing fun things together helps build a reserve of good feelings that can help you get through hard times. Let your child help plan family events and outings.

*Example: If you are planning a vacation, let your child order brochures and help decide where to stop and what to see.*

■ **6. Practice reflective listening.** When you are working together with your youth to solve a problem, stop to summarize what he or

she has said so your youth knows you have really heard. Resist the temptation to criticize or lecture.

*Example: When your daughter says, "I hate the way I look. Everything looks dumb on me," you might say, "Sounds like you're pretty frustrated over the way your clothes look on you."*

■ **7. Keep one-on-one time.** Spending one-on-one time alone with your son or daughter can be a special time for both of you. That time together can let your child know you really care.

*Example: Take turns with each child in the family for a special time. It could be going out for breakfast, playing a board game, or going for a hike or bike ride together.*

■ **8. Use driving time to talk.** Most parents of pre- and early teens spend time driving the child to lessons, ball games or shopping. Children may be more willing to open up in this environment than when they are at home.

*Example: On the way to basketball practice, say to your son or daughter, "Tell me about school today," or ask about a favorite hobby.*

■ **9. Talk about values.** Use other opportunities, such as discussions about what happened at school, in the news, or on a TV show, to talk about your values. Don't assume your children know what you believe and consider important.

*Example: After watching a TV program in which a character*

wrecked his car and the passenger with him was hurt, you might say, "This is an example of why we think it's really important not to drink. How do you think the character could have handled the problem better?"

■ **10. Hold family meetings.** Set a specific time each week with family members to set schedules, plan fun things to do together as a family, and deal with concerns. Start with compliments and end with a snack or game.

*Example: A weekly family meeting, perhaps on Sunday evening, helps everyone get organized for the week. You might use the time to share good things that happened to family members during the past week or activities members are looking forward to. This is a good time to thank each other for specific tasks they have done for the family, as well as make plans for what needs to be done during the following week. Be sure to include something fun, too.*

### Dealing with problems

■ **11. Use "I" statements.** Let your child know how you feel, why, and what you want them to do. "I feel \_\_\_ when you \_\_\_ because \_\_\_. This is what I want you to do\_\_\_."

*Example: When your daughter leaves her curling iron on, you might say, "I worry when you leave the curling iron on because it uses electricity and could start a fire. Please go turn it off right now."*

■ **12. Use natural consequences.** Let your child learn from what happens naturally without scolding, lecturing, or rescuing.

*Example: When your son forgets his gloves on a cold day, let him*

*find out how uncomfortable he gets so that he will decide on his own to remember next time. Don't lecture!*

■ **13. Use logical consequences.**

Create consequences with your child for specific rules. They should be related to the rule broken, reasonable, and respectful. Remember, rules and consequences should change as your child grows and develops. However, children of all ages need rules to help provide them with structure for living. It is important that parents communicate rules and consequences clearly to their child ahead of time.

*Example: If your daughter comes home late in the evening after spending time with a friend, remind her that the consequence is not getting to go out the next evening.*

■ **14. Solve problems together.**

Work together with your child, listening to each other's point of view, brainstorming solutions, and choosing options to try. As children move into the teen years it is far more effective to engage them in conversation with you to resolve issues than expect them to follow your rules without question.

*Example: Your son received a low grade in social studies. Sit down together to think of ways he might improve his grade—finishing homework, asking the teacher for help. Listen to his ideas; don't lecture.*

■ **15. Follow through with decisions.**

After an agreement has been reached, simply follow through by reminding your child about his or her agreement. Consistency day to day between parents and/or partners and across situations is an important principle for parents to keep in mind.

*Example: If you child has agreed to empty the garbage after supper and you find it still under the sink, find your child and give a short reminder that the garbage still needs to be taken out. (Use as few words as possible.)*

■ **16. Wait until you are calm to deal with a problem.**

Do not discipline your child when you are angry. Discussing a problem when either of you is upset only leads to fighting and additional negative feelings.

*Example: Your daughter sasses you when you ask her to clean her room. You're angry but instead of getting into a fight, you tell her you'll discuss her sassing after you've cooled down.*

The teen years are a period of change - for you and your teen. Seek information to help you understand the changes your teen is going through and what you as a parent can do to help your teen develop positively. Talk to other parents for ideas and support. Read books on teen development. Talk to your child and work together for solutions. You may be surprised to find that when they're taken seriously, young people have many good ideas.

And remember, it's never too late to try new solutions to problems with your pre- or early teen. Even though they may think they're quite grown up, you still have a number of years to influence them and to build an even more positive relationship. Underneath your pre- or young teen is the same child you loved and guided as a baby and small child. In spite of all the challenges, the teen years can be good years for both you and your child. Seek to be a knowledgeable, thoughtful, and deliberate parent.

For more information, read *Positive Discipline A-Z: 1,001 Solutions to Everyday Parenting Problems* by J. Nelsen, L. Lott and H.S. Glenn, from Sunrise Books, 1-800-456-7770. Two other publications in this series, PM 1547A and PM 1547G, are available at ISU Extension offices.



File: Family life 8

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