

Parenting



Parenting a Teenager

Ah, the teenage years. Ask any parent who has “been there, done that” and they are likely to label the teenager as the most difficult age range to parent.

There's the increased independence, challenging of authority and more time being influenced by friends. Even the most involved, positive parents can find themselves with an uphill battle in trying to build a strong relationships with their teen.

One of the most difficult aspects of parenting a teen is being able to differentiate a passing behavior from a potentially dangerous situation. Talk with your teen about her concerns, and pay attention to any changes in her behavior.

KEEP ACTIVE

Sports and recreation offer great ways to keep your teen involved in positive, rewarding activities. Encourage your child to try out for sports teams if they show the interest in doing so. If team sports aren't their thing, you can encourage golf, tennis, skateboarding or rock climbing.

Being employed also can provide a positive atmosphere for your teen. If your teen works, use the opportunity to talk about expectations, responsibilities and other ways of behaving respectfully in a public setting.

Help your child set real goals with his or her money, which will provide another point of connection between you and your teen. You can



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set up a weekly “finance meeting” with your child to talk about upcoming bills and opportunities for paying down certain bills. These types of financial lessons can set up a strong understanding of financial responsibility that

can last long into adulthood.

DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making can be difficult for teenagers. Encourage your teen to develop solutions to problems or conflicts. Help your teenager

learn to make good decisions. Create opportunities for him to use his own judgment, and be available for advice and support.

Respect your teen's opinion. Listen to her without playing down her concerns. If your

teen engages in interactive Internet media such as games, chat rooms and instant messaging, encourage her to make good decisions about what she posts and the amount of time she spends on these activities.

Kids' Teeth Health

They hurt coming in and leave adorably awkward gaps when they come out. Teeth are an important aspect of child health.

It's up to you to keep your child confident in flashing those pearly whites for years to come. No pressure! You can reasonably assume that avoiding things like sweets, sticky foods and between-meal snacks is good advice.

But what about other questions you may have, such as, "At what age should I start taking my child to the dentist?" or "What type of toothpaste should I use?"

THE DENTIST

The American Dental Association recommends that parents take their child to a dentist no later than his or her first birthday. This gives the dentist a chance to look for early problems with your child's teeth, while also helping your child become comfortable with his or her dentist.

Pediatric dentists specialize in treating children's dental health and will offer a positive office environment specifically for putting children at ease. Review important information about diet, bottles, tooth brushing and fluoride use with your child's dentist.

BEST PRACTICES

Good dental hygiene habits should begin before your

child's first tooth comes in. You should wipe your baby's gums with a soft damp cloth after feedings to help prevent the buildup of potentially harmful bacteria.

Once you start seeing teeth pop through the gums, it is time to use a soft children's toothbrush twice a day.

Fluoride toothpaste should not be used until your child is preschool age. Use a pea-sized amount on your child's toothbrush. Any larger amount can have negative effects as young children tend to swallow most of the toothpaste. This can cause permanent stains on teeth.

CAVITIES

Your child might be at risk for cavities if he or she eats a lot of sugary foods, such as cookies or candy. Sweet liquids such as fruit juice and soda also can be harmful to your child's teeth.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry identifies

these risk factors for potential dental issues:

- Was born early (prematurely) or weighed very little at birth (low birth weight)
- Has ongoing special health care needs
- Has white spots or brown areas on any teeth
- Does not go to the dentist very often



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Improving Toddler Behavior

Whoever said being a toddler is easy must not remember being a toddler!

You're constantly being told what not to do, you can't speak clearly enough to let your true thoughts be known, and you have to take naps. OK, that last one may actually be a good thing, depending on who you ask. Toddlers have many challenges in their lives, just like adults.

As a parent, it isn't always easy to stay calm in the face of a raging tantrum or questions on repeat. But remember that love, praise and positive attention can go a long way in shaping what kind of adult your child grows to become.

If you have a toddler displaying behavioral issues, there are strategies you can implement to help limit their frequency and duration.

HAVE MORE FUN

Many toddlers act out if they're not receiving enough attention. Devote special time every day to play or sing with your toddler on an individual basis. During playtime, avoid overloading your child with rules.

Keep the setting positive and collaborative as you work together to build a house of wooden blocks or read books. As long as there are no health or safety hazards, toddlers should be encouraged to try new activities and experiences.



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KNOW YOUR CHILD

According to the American Psychological Association, one

of the most important aspects of a parent-toddler relationship is acceptance. As your child grows, he or she will display personality traits that you

should respect and love.

This can be difficult, especially if your child acts in a way that you're not used to or don't fully understand. The APA

urges parents to respect their child's developing individuality and avoid labeling features of their temperament, which can encourage negative behavior.

Communication Is Key

Depending on the age of your child, communicating with them can either be an absolute breeze or an everyday challenge.

Parenting is hard work, and maintaining a good connection with teens can be difficult, especially since parents are dealing with many other pressures, including work, money and relationships with a spouse or loved one.

If you are having problems over a long period of time making inroads with your child, experts urge you to seek help from a mental health professional.

BECOME INVESTED

Does your daughter love gymnastics? It is paramount that you also take an interest in the sport, even if you don't know the difference between a front aerial and a full twist. Showing that you care about her favorite activities can go a long way in building a special bond around them.

This holds true for whatever your child spends time doing, from video games and reading to music and the arts. Learn as much as you can about your child's skill-set and encourage them to try new things within their specialties.

WATCH YOUR TONE

Let's say your high school

son gets in trouble for fighting at school. You may be disappointed in the overall news, but it is important to talk with your child about the situation before doling out a punishment or giving a speech.

Kids will tune you out if you appear defensive, so try your best to soften any strong reactions that you feel coming on.

When it comes time for their counter, listen to their points without putting them down, expressing negative body language or cutting them off mid-sentence.

OTHER TIPS

The American Psychological Association offers these additional tips for communicating with your child:

- Ask your children what they may want or need from you in a conversation, such as advice, listening, support in dealing with feelings or help solving a problem.
- Realize your children may test you by telling you a small part of what is bothering them. Listen carefully to what they say, encourage them to talk, and they may share the rest of the story.
- Focus on your child's feelings rather than your own during your conversation.



Distracted Parenting

What do your cellphone, laptop and stove have in common? They are all major distractions that can get in the way of your relationships with your children.

This according to a recent study guided by the answers of those who know most about the topic – your kids.

A *Highlights* magazine survey polled 1,500 children on topics ranging from school and food to their parents and siblings. Some of the most telling survey results found that 62 percent of children age six to 12 answered “yes” when asked if their parents are ever distracted or focused on other things when their children are trying to talk to them.

THE CULPRITS

Here are some of the main culprits in the world of a distracted parent:

Cell phone: The *Highlights* survey found the phone to be the biggest parent distraction. In fact, 11 percent of children surveyed said their parents would “go crazy” if they had to give up their phone for a day. Prove them wrong by keeping your phone in the other room while you play or read with them. They will appreciate your undivided attention.

Laptop: Much like the phone, parents can become distracted by the urge to check their Facebook, email or stock performances, all of which will be waiting for you after you spend time interacting with your children.



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Cooking: This is a tough one to limit, especially if you’re focused on cooking healthy meals. You can involve them in the meal-making process to let them feel engaged with what you’re working on.

WHEN TO TALK

Even though more than half of kids found their parents to

be distracted, they also know that there are better times than others to talk them about something important. Thirty-three percent of kids said the best time was during a meal,

followed by 29 percent who said it was bedtime.

Eighteen percent said the best time was in the car, while another 7 percent said their parents were available anytime.

The Football Dilemma

The verdict is in — kind of. Parents are worried about their children playing football but not enough to keep them off the field.

A new Associated Press poll found that nearly 50 percent of parents said they're not comfortable with their child playing football. Similar numbers were found for hockey (44 percent) and wrestling (45 percent).

Only 5 percent, however, said they have discouraged their child from actually playing or participating in these sports over the past two years.

MAJOR WORRIES

The increase in parents' concern comes as several high-profile lawsuits have challenged the way that the National Football League or the National Collegiate Athletic Association have handled concussions in their sports.

Thousands of professional players sued the NFL, and a \$675 million settlement that would compensate them for concussion-related claims is pending. Another tentative settlement with the NCAA would set up a \$70 million fund to test thousands of current and former college athletes for brain trauma.

DECREASE IN PARTICIPATION

Even with these worries at the professional and collegiate levels, statistics show only a slight decline in the number of

high school students playing football.

According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, nearly 1.1 million students played 11-man football during the 2012-13 school year. The number was down approximately 10,000 from the year before and more than 20,000 since 2009-08.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

USA Football and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have created Heads Up Football, a comprehensive collection of resources, programs, applications and promotions to advance youth football safety.

These programs have increased training available for coaches. They also have put emphasis on specific guidelines, like encouraging players to wear properly fitted helmets and shoulder pads.

Certified league administrators, coaches and parents should be able to recognize equipment that fits properly, USA football advises, and should check the fit of equipment throughout the season. This is because improperly fitted equipment can place an athlete at greater risk for injury.



Rating Yourself

Would you consider yourself an excellent parent? If yes, then you are not alone. In spite of today's parenting challenges, moms and dads give themselves strong grades for their parenting skills.

Among all parents with children under age 18, 24 percent say they have done an excellent job, and an additional 45 percent say they have done a very good job, according to a recent Pew Research Center study.

Another 24 percent say they have done a good job, and only 6 percent rate their job as parents as fair or poor. Taking a deeper look into the Pew findings reveals an interesting look into the minds of today's parents regarding their work schedules and relationships with their spouses.

Seventy-three percent of mothers give themselves an excellent or good parenting rating, compared to 64 percent of fathers.

Among mothers with children under age 18 who work full or part time, 78 percent say they are doing an excellent or very good job as parents. Among mothers who are not employed, 66 percent say the same.

Among mothers with children under age 18, married moms are happier overall than unmarried moms (43 percent compared to 23 percent, respectively).

Marital status is strongly aligned with views about what people consider the ideal work situation. Among unmarried mothers, about half say working full time is ideal. Only 23 percent of married mothers today say their ideal situation is to work full-time.

In balancing the responsibilities of work and family life, 16 percent of working mothers and 15 percent of working fathers say it is very difficult. Overall, 56 percent of working mothers and 50 percent of working fathers say it's difficult for them to balance work and family.

