



Shoulder to Shoulder
Raising Teens Together



www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org

10 TIPS TO STAY AHEAD OF THE GAME

BE A PARENT, NOT A PAL.

Let's face it: the teen years can be bumpy. As parents, we need to be our teen's anchor, not their best friend. Set clear boundaries, yet approach your teen with love and respect. So figure out those limits that work best for your family, and then enforce them. All the time. While it may feel like we're "losing our kid" during the teen years, we're really just a few years away from forming a true friendship as our teen enters adulthood.

IGNORE THE ATTITUDE. SAVE YOUR ENERGY FOR THE BIG STUFF.

Choose your battles. Is it really worth arguing about blue hair? If your teen's challenging or general attitude gets under your skin, decide whether it's a battle you want to tackle. Of course you want to stand your ground on issues that are important, but not all issues are monumental. Be selective.

TALK THE TOUGH TALKS.

Sex. Cigarettes. Drugs. Alcohol. Guns. Gangs. Definitely uncomfortable topics of conversation with your teen to be sure. But teens need to hear your perspective on these topics, understand why you feel the way you do, and know you are someone they can come to with questions.

COMPLIMENT YOUR TEENS.

Make it a habit to say at least three positive things to your teen every day (*even if it's just, "hey, thanks for feeding the dog."*) It's easy to notice the negative, but no one has yet to complain about receiving a compliment – even a teen.

GET TO KNOW THEM.

TEEN FRIENDS AND THEIR PARENTS

Friends are a big deal. And you can learn a lot about your teen through their friends, but connecting with the parents of these friends is your lifeline. By checking in with the parents, you'll have your finger on the pulse of your teen's activity – inside and outside the home. Talking with other parents also lets you know that you're not the only one who (*gasp!*) sets rules for your teen.

DON'T BE A MAID.

It's important for teens to have meaningful roles and responsibilities in the family. Start with household chores – mowing the lawn, making a meal or doing the laundry – and work your way up. These tasks prepare teens for independent living as young adults, and give them a sense of responsibility and accomplishment (*as long as they don't mix the white clothes with the colors, of course*).

MAKE RESPECT A TWO-WAY STREET.

If you expect respectful behavior from your teen demonstrate it daily with your teen. And this may be difficult as teens roll their eyes at you in exasperation or give you the cold shoulder. But grit your teeth and get through it. Respect will be the foundation for building good relationships and getting teens to accept their family's values as their own.

LISTEN, DON'T LECTURE.

When kids are ready to talk, be ready to listen. While this undoubtedly happens when you are running late or are really tired from a busy day at work, when you stop and listen to your teen, it's amazing what you'll find out. But here's the kicker: resist the urge to offer too much advice or tell them what to do. Help them figure it out for themselves by asking questions that will guide their decisions.

AGREE TO DISAGREE.

It may seem like you disagree about everything with your teen. Don't worry; it's normal. Teens need to question "the norm" to figure out what makes sense to them and learn how to think for themselves. And while a little latitude is a good thing, you still have the final word when it comes to how your teen should behave.

HAVE FUN TOGETHER.

While the teenage years are certainly challenging, there can be plenty of fun times and good memories. The trick? Know what "fun" means to your teen. And know that it won't always be your idea of "fun." At this stage, you may be the last person your teen wants to be seen with in public, but offer to drive your teen and his/her friends to a movie or sport activity (*listen to the conversation during the drive – it will be a wealth of information on your teen*). Discovering creative ways to spend time with your teen is what's important – and makes one-on-one time enjoyable.