



Teen Discipline Guidelines

Keep in mind - two purposes of discipline with teens:

- Immediate purpose is to provide a mix of instruction, encouragement, and correction as need in order to teach an adolescent to live according to family values and within family rules.
- Long term goal is to help adolescents develop enough self-discipline to manage themselves and their lives independently and well.

Best practices for discipline with teens:

1. Support clear and consistent rules. Family rules are most effective when developed together as a family. Parents have final say but when family members are invited to describe family rules they believe are important for all, kids are more likely to follow them. It is essential that parents describe specifically what is and what is not permitted and expected. Ideally it is a brief list of fundamental ground rules. And most importantly parents are consistent in sticking with the rules. Examples: "We always get permission before using other people's belonging." "Each person in the family helps by completing chores that contribute to the well being of the whole family."

2. Relentlessly apply patient insistence. Calmly keep after teenager until agreed chore or request is accomplished. Refrain from getting upset. You might ask, "By when will this task be completed?" In this way you give the teen some control while still expecting cooperation.

3. Make corrections without any criticism or blame. Focus mostly on teen's decisions and possible outcomes of those decisions. "We don't agree with your decision to stay out beyond curfew because we believe it puts you in danger without supervision and as a result you will need to skip going out tonight. We hope that you will decide to come home on time the next time you go out."

4. Praise and celebrate positive behavior often and enthusiastically. You want teens to feel that any corrections are given in a larger context of acknowledging everything your teen is doing well (and all the bad things she could be doing but is not). Be enthusiastic and specific in your descriptions of positive behavior. The perspective you want to communicate is something like *we recognize that you generally manage your life well and are growing, trying out new ways of doing things and learning from mistakes.* This is especially important for discouraged and acting out teens.



5. Expect your adolescent to speak up and have opinions. When talking with an adolescent about mistakes or misbehavior, be ready to listen to his explanation of what occurred and why. Teens need and value adults carefully listening and trying to understand their experiences. You want your adolescent to know that she will get a careful hearing of her side of things as they explain their behavior.

6. Teach reciprocal giving. Adolescents are ready to understand that parents make contributions to their lives and expect the teen to contribute to the family. Avoid "tit for tat" and "I won't do this for you unless you do this for me." You don't want to model any kind of "revenge." However do remind your teen that as they mature they are expected to contribute as well.

7. Express concern before consequences. When encountering misbehavior start with empathy. Make sure your teen is ok and feeling alright. Sometimes misbehavior is a signal that something else is going wrong in your child's life. "Tell us what is happening with you before we talk about what needs to happen as a result of your behavior." This doesn't usually mean a change in consequences but might mean additional support is needed. "I see that you have been failing to submit homework in math class. Help me understand what is going on for you right now."

8. Respect your child's right to choose. Realistically speaking you cannot make an adolescent do almost anything and it is hard to prevent them from doing many things as well. "You can't stop me and you can't make me," is actually true most of the time. Therefore it is important for parents to recognize with the teen, 'You are in charge of your choices and also in facing the consequences of those choices.' Help them understand that their behavior influences how you choose to behave in response to those choices.

9. Offer guidance consistently and respectfully. As a parent you feel responsible to offer guidance but how that guidance is provided is important. Be direct and be sensitive to your child's traits and preferences. After your child has struggled with a social event or made what you consider a mistake in judgment, you might say something like, "We see this a little differently than you do right now. We'd like to talk with you about how we see it." Avoid just giving unsolicited advice, but offer it without blame, shame or judgment and be mindful of the best time to make that offer.

10. Connection before consequences. Communicate carefully with your child when a misbehavior has taken place. "When serious things like this happen, we need to listen to each other carefully." Ideally you listen to your child's point of view and then they listen to yours. Learning to communicate at all times without any blame, shame or judgment is the foundation of building these kind of open communication connections so important to teens' positive development, confidence and safety.

