



Support Teens as They Push Away

Parenting teenagers can be quite the challenge. Just as teens are striving for independence and often push their parents away, parents need to support teens by being involved as much as or more than ever before. This can lead to clashes and disagreements as parents and teens adjust to redefined roles. Working together (with your co-parent(s) and teens) and using positive parenting techniques can minimize the fighting. When everyone is on the same page, you can make it through the teen years in one piece!

Harvard University Professor Nancy Hill, one of the co-authors of a recent study in Child Development, reports, "The good news is that youth still want their parents to be involved. This involvement doesn't have to be a power struggle. Parents need not be afraid to allow teens to try and succeed or try, fail, and try again. Parents are in the single-best position to cultivate, encourage, and affirm their teens development."

This study identified specific types of parent involvement that were associated with the following better outcomes:

- higher grade-point averages
- decreased behavioral concerns
- reduced depressive symptoms

Scaffold Independence

Hill reports that scaffolding means “letting teens try out things independently, with a ‘safety net’.” Teens need to be given opportunities to try new endeavors without being rescued from possible failure. Parents can wait for teens to ask for help before rushing in to provide it. Prior to teens attempting new experiences, parents can talk through the choices and possible outcomes associated with these experiences. Younger children and adolescents prepare for this freedom by being given equal (in the parents’ eyes) options and tasks that may be difficult (like new chores) at home.

A tried-and-true method teachers use to help younger children learn new skills works equally well with teens and adults. The I Do-We Do-You Do method starts with an expert demonstrating a new skill. Then, both people work together. Next, the expert watches to make sure the skill is mastered. If needed, the expert can reteach all or part of the skill. Finally, the task is assigned to be done independently.

Parents can support teens by making sure they can accomplish adult chores before they leave home for college or work. Children and teens can learn to cook, do laundry, and clean in stages over time so the tasks are not overwhelming when they turn 18.

Provide Structure at Home

Parents support academic achievement by providing time, space, and materials for teens to manage their own schoolwork. Allow children and teens to do their own homework and contact the teacher themselves (for teens). Allow children and teens to struggle a little bit. Remain prepared to get them help if the struggle is ongoing. Most people learn more by failing than by succeeding without doing much work.

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and rescue them until they ask.

Parents can help their children practice talking to the teacher about getting extra help or provide tutors when necessary. Parents can establish family expectations about homework and leisure

activities, while providing academic enrichment for the whole family, such as museum trips.

Hill admits, "It is not easy to watch—or let—your son or daughter fail to complete assignments or not earn grades that you know they are fully capable of earning. If you can stomach it, let them wait until the last minute to do the big assignment and don't jump in and rescue them until they ask. Yes, it is hard. But in the process, they might learn the bigger lesson about the consequences of their actions and how to recognize when they need help."

Link Education to Future Success

When parents expect children to attend college, children are more likely to make better grades. Success in school is correlated to college acceptance or higher paying jobs. Asking children about their future goals and plans can help pave the way towards accomplishing them. Support teens by reviewing essays or homework if they ask for assistance or encourage them to speak to a teacher if they need extra help. Some teens need to role play how they will ask a teacher (or boss) for help. They can do this with a parent or sibling to gain experience. When you support teens in accomplishing their goals by linking current education to future job opportunities, they will be able to more easily reach those goals.

Demonstrate Warmth

According to this study, parental warmth not only supports teens, but actually increases the effectiveness of the other strategies. Hill reminds us, "Even as 'warm fuzzies' are not often reciprocated, teens still need them, still need to know they are loved unconditionally. Don't miss the opportunity to say or show love, warmth, and affection toward even your most prickly teen." Let teens know when they are doing a good job. Show up at their activities and events. Plan family outings and [activities](#). Provide [encouragement](#) for continuing to be involved and working hard. Expect that your teen will balk, but know that they need to feel included and wanted.