

# Positive Parenting Tips: Early and Middle Adolescence

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Early adolescence—between the ages of 12 and 14—is a time of many physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. During puberty, hormones cause changes that your child might worry about. They may also be concerned about how others view them. This will be a time when adolescents might face peer pressure to use alcohol, tobacco products, and drugs, and to have sex. Other challenges can be eating disorders, depression, and family problems. At this age, adolescents become more independent and will make more of their own choices about friends, sports, studying, and school. Trust is important. As she develops independence, she needs to know she has your support. At the same time, she needs you to respect her need for privacy.

Here are some positive ways to help your 12 to 14 year old:

- Be honest and direct when talking about sensitive subjects such as drugs, drinking, smoking, and sex.
- Encourage your child to get exercise, such as joining a team or taking up an individual sport. Helping with household tasks, such as mowing the lawn, walking the dog, or washing the car can also keep your child active.
- Meal time is very important for families. Eating together helps adolescents make better choices about the foods they eat, promotes healthy weight, and gives your family time to talk to each other.
- Meet and get to know your child's friends.
- Show an interest in her school life.
- Help your child make healthy choices and encourage him to make his own decisions.
- Respect your child's opinions and take into account her thoughts and feelings. It's important that she knows you are listening to her.

Middle adolescence—between the ages of 15 and 17—is a time of physical, mental, cognitive, and sexual changes for your teenager. Most girls will have completed puberty by now and be physically mature. Boys might still be maturing physically. Your teenager might have concerns about her body size, shape, or weight. Eating disorders can be common, especially among girls. Your teenager is developing his unique personality and opinions. Although peer relationships are still important, your teenager will have other interests as he develops his identity. During middle adolescence there is increased independence and responsibility. Many teenagers start working. Some will prepare to leave home soon after high school.

Here are some positive ways to help the development of your 15 to 17 year old:

- Talk to your teenager about her concerns and pay attention to any changes in her behavior. Ask if she's had suicidal thoughts, particularly if she seems sad or depressed. Asking about suicidal thoughts won't cause her to have these thoughts, but it will let her know that you care about how she feels. Seek professional help, if necessary.
- Show interest in your teenager's school and extracurricular interests and activities. Encourage him to become involved in activities such as sports, music, theater, and art.
- Compliment your teenager and celebrate her efforts and accomplishments.
- Show affection for your teenager. Spend time together.

- Respect your teenager's opinion. Listen to him without down playing his concerns.
- Encourage your teenager to volunteer and become involved in community activities.
- Encourage your teenager to develop solutions to problems or conflicts. Help him learn to make good decisions. Create opportunities for him to use his own judgment. Be available for advice and support.
- If your teenager engages in Internet activities such as games, chat rooms, and instant messaging, encourage him to be disciplined about the amount of time he is involved with it.
- If your teenager works, use the opportunity to discuss expectations, responsibility, and other aspects of behaving respectfully in a public setting.
- Help her plan ahead for difficult or uncomfortable situations. Discuss what she can do if she's pressured to have sex, offered a ride from someone who has been drinking, or is with someone who is using drugs.
- Respect your teenager's need for privacy.
- Encourage your teenager to get enough sleep and exercise, and to eat healthy, balanced meals.
- Have meals as a family. Eating together will promote healthy weight, help her make better choices about the foods she eats, and give family members time to talk with each other. A teenager who eat meals with the family is more likely to have better grades and less likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs. She is also less likely to get into fights, think about suicide, or engage in sexual activity.

To learn more about child development, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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