

TEENS NEED LIMITS & BOUNDARIES

Parenting teens can be both exciting and challenging. Teens are on a journey towards adulthood. They want to go out, do things, try new experiences and put forward their ideas and opinions. This is all part of growing up. Setting limits and boundaries lets them know we care and is a balance between keeping teens safe and providing them with the opportunity to develop and learn life skills i.e. responsibility, independence, managing feelings, problem solving and social skills

Teens need limits and boundaries that gradually change as they grow. Limits and boundaries are like an invisible safety net within which teens have room to learn, grow and be safe. If the net is too tight it stifles growth. If there is no net this is unsafe as teens are still developing emotionally, physically, socially and psychologically.

For limits and boundaries to be effective teens need to feel loved, cared for and respected by their family. Teens then know the rules are out of love and care even though they may not like them

One way to avoid some difficulties is to plan ahead. Don't wait to make a rule or consequence in the heat of the moment. It is better to discuss rules and consequences when everyone is calm. Make sure rules and the consequences for breaking rules are clear and consistent. It is best to have a consequence for rule breaking which is immediate and short term then the teen can have the opportunity to practice doing the right thing. If your fourteen year old comes home half an hour late on Friday night then they may have to come home half an hour early next time they go out.

If you have to discipline your teenager speak to them in private and try and stay calm. By speaking in a calm voice we communicate we are in control.

Learn to listen and get to know your teen. Acknowledge the good things your teen does and plan one on one and family time. This all helps to strengthen the relationship with your teen.

Pick and choose your battles. Maybe a messy room is not worth a disagreement. Learn to stand firm on issues that may be harmful to your teen like no drugs and alcohol. Don't be afraid to say "NO" to your teen for the right reasons i.e. to keep them safe.

Don't be afraid to discuss difficult subjects or talk to teens if they seem upset. Sometimes when teens are at their most difficult is when they need your care the most. It is best to avoid "you" statements and judgements i.e. "You're so angry all the time, I don't know what's wrong with you." This type of statement tends to close communication and make the person more upset. It is better to use "I" statements, such as, "I'm worried about you, I love you and I feel sad when I see you upset do you want to talk about it". Perhaps they'll say no but at least they know the offer is there.

Don't stop supporting your teen or withhold your love. Children and teens need to know they are loved even though at times we may not like their behaviour.

Have fun with your teen and keep a sense of humour.

Remember that you're not alone. If you are concerned about your teen get support and talk to someone – friends, family, school counsellor or contact a community agency that works with teens and families.