

10 things parents can do

to make a difference for their teen

you are the most powerful influence in your child's life. (Though it may not always seem that way). The more involved you are, the more valued your child will feel, and the less likely that they will engage in risky behaviors such as tobacco use, sexually risky behavior, injury risks, and more.

So, what can you do?

The following family rituals aren't always easy. But research shows they work.

1 **Eat together.** Eat dinner as a family often. Meals are a great time for conversation.

2 **Make time for your teen.** Establish a weekly "date" with your child — even something as simple as going for coffee or bagels.

3 **Be at home after school.** The hours from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. are a danger zone for risky behaviors.

4 **Know where your child is.** Get to know your child's friends. Don't be afraid to ask who they'll be with and what they'll be doing. Set a curfew and enforce it. Have kids check in at regular times. Call parents whose home is to be used for a party. Check to see whether their rules are the same as yours.

5 Set clear rules. Talk with your child early about rules for appropriate behavior including drinking, sexuality, seat belt use, tobacco use. (It's not too early: kids aged 11 to 13 are at high risk for experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs). Rules help teens feel secure.

6 Enforce rules consistently. Discuss in advance the consequences of breaking rules, and follow through with consequences when rules are broken. Don't negotiate consequences. Don't threaten and fail to follow through.

7 Speak up. Use "teachable moments." Everyday situations — TV, news, — are wonderful opportunities to talk about your values. Be specific about what you think and why. Make it a conversation not a lecture or confrontation. Teens really do care what their parents think.

8 Model the behavior you expect in your child. Do you wear a seat belt? Smoke? Use alcohol responsibly? Complain about your physical appearance? What messages are you sending to you child?

9 Listen. Really listen. You don't have to agree, but let your child know that you hear and understand what they are trying to tell you. If he or she feels heard, your child will be more likely to open up to you.

10 Catch them being good. Reward good behavior immediately. Expressions of love and appreciation go a long way toward making your child feel good about himself or herself.

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HealthPartners Center for Health Promotion*

#110526

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