

Parents Still Make the Difference!



Set boundaries & goals for your teen over the summer

Your teen's need for structure and learning doesn't end on the last day of school. But without a plan, your teen may end up just drifting through the summer. Here are some things to think about as you approach the summer months:

- Set learning goals. Decades of research show that when teens simply let their brains go on vacation all summer, their achievement tends to slip. Your teen can avoid this "summer slide" by setting learning goals. Perhaps he wants to learn how to play a musical instrument. Or maybe he wants to read all the books in a series. Whatever his goal, make a plan to help him achieve it.
- Set boundaries with your teen. You may feel comfortable relaxing some of your family rules. Bedtime may be pushed back a bit if your teen doesn't have to get up for a job or an activity. But don't let your teen out of all responsibilities. He should still have to take on some chores around the house. And your limits on screen time should stay in place. No teen should spend the summer staring at a computer or a TV screen.
- Encourage physical activity. Studies show that summer months are a time when teens often gain weight. So schedule a time when your whole family can exercise. Take a walk in a nearby park. Visit a community recreation center and sign up for a summer class.

Discourage offensive language and build respect in your teen

Teens often don't realize that courteous language shows respect for others--and swear words show disrespect, especially at school and in the workplace.

If your teen frequently uses bad language, encourage him to stop. To discourage swearing:

- Offer alternatives, like "sugar beets" or "fuzzle." As an added benefit, if your teen usually swears when he's angry, the funny-sounding words might cheer him up.
- Create a "swear jar." It's an oldie but goodie--and especially effective with teens who hate parting with their money. Every time a family member swears, that person has to put a quarter into the jar. At the end of the summer, use the money for a family treat.
- Offer a trade-off. Write down some small chores onto slips of paper and put them in a bowl. Each time a family member swears, that person has to choose a task from the bowl and complete it.

You can improve communication between you and your teenager

All parents know that talking to teens can be tricky. Review these dos and don'ts to make sure you're getting the most out of your communications:

- Do listen. If your teen feels like you aren't listening to him, he'll stop trying to talk to you. Focus on what he is saying and truly listen--don't cut him off with advice or a lecture.
- Do tell your teen often that you love him. Knowing you care about him will strengthen your relationship.
- Don't "override" your teen. If you start a conversation with, "This is how it's going to be," your teen will tune you out. A one-sided "conversation" is really just a lecture!
- Don't solve your teen's problems for him. If your teen talks about a problem, listen and ask questions to help him make a decision rather than just telling him what to do.
- Don't ask questions you already know the answers to. If you see your teen trying to sneak out of the house before finishing homework, don't ask, "What are you doing?" That gives your teen the chance to start an argument. Instead, simply say, "You know you're not allowed to go out before you finish homework."
- Don't let your teen wear you down. Stand your ground and end the conversation when it hits that repetitive point.