

## Parenting Teens in Today's World: Building Your Parental Toolbox

Raising teenagers has never been easy, but parenting in today's complex world brings a whole new set of challenges. With constant access to technology, a 24/7 news cycle, and social pressures magnified through social media, the adolescent years can feel especially daunting and stressful for parents and teens alike.



As parents, it's natural to occasionally feel like our tried-and-true parenting techniques aren't cutting it anymore. The days of "because I said so" as an acceptable reason for setting rules have long passed. Our teens have instant access to information we couldn't have imagined at their age, and they are maturing faster both physically and socially.

The good news is that we don't have to figure this all out on our own. Researchers have identified strategies and frameworks that can help parents navigate the choppy waters of adolescence. Understanding these concepts and having them in your parental toolbox will allow you to approach parenting teens with more empathy, flexibility, and effectiveness.

### Grow Their Growth Mindset

Psychologist Carol Dweck pioneered the concept of a growth mindset: the belief that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. This contrasts with a fixed mindset, which assumes that talents and intelligence are static.

Parents can nurture a growth mindset in their teens by:

- Praising effort over innate talent. Saying "I'm proud of how hard you worked" rather than "You're so smart" encourages teens to persist through challenges.
- Allowing them to struggle through difficulties rather than rushing in to help. Your teen will learn more from overcoming obstacles themselves.

- Encouraging a focus on progress over perfection. Small wins keep motivation high.
- Modeling a growth mindset in your own attitude toward learning and challenges. Your teen will follow your lead.

Providing regular growth mindset “pep talks” can also inspire teens to see setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than indications they lack necessary abilities.

## Focus on Positive Childhood Experiences

Childhood trauma clearly has lifelong effects, but science shows that positive childhood experiences can be equally important in shaping who we become. Positive childhood experiences (PCEs) include:

- Feeling able to talk with family about feelings
- Feeling supported by friends and family
- Feeling a sense of belonging at school
- Feeling that family stands by you during difficult times
- Feeling safe and protected by an adult in your family

As a parent, you have significant influence over your teen’s positive experiences. Foster strong connections, provide unconditional support, and ensure your teen feels secure enough to come to you with problems. These positive experiences will help counterbalance the inevitable negative ones.

## Embrace Collaborative Problem Solving

The days when parents could simply dictate solutions to their teens are long gone. Today’s adolescents want—and deserve—to have input on issues that affect them. Collaborative problem solving allows you to incorporate your teen’s perspectives while still providing guidance and boundaries.

To problem solve collaboratively:

- Invite your teen to share their thoughts and suggestions without judgment. Really listen and reflect back what you hear.
- Once your teen feels heard, share your own concerns and perspectives. Look for areas of common ground.

- Jointly brainstorm potential solutions that address the core concerns of both sides.
- Decide on an approach to try, with agreed-upon reviewing points.
- Revisit and adjust as needed, continuing to hear each other out.

Compromise when you can, but don't abdicate your role as the parent. Ultimately, you need to decide what's in your teen's long-term best interests.

## Take Care of Yourself

You simply cannot pour from an empty cup as a parent. Make sure you are prioritizing your own well-being with proper rest, healthy food, exercise, and activities you enjoy. Don't neglect your relationships with other adult supporters. Seek help from a professional if parenting stress is overwhelming.

Your teen needs you at your best. Modeling self-care and emotional maturity is one of the most valuable gifts you can give your adolescent.

## Lead with Empathy

The infamous eye-roll, the snappy comebacks, the unpredictable mood swings—dealing with disrespectful behavior can quickly frustrate parents. But in many cases, lashing out is your teen's way of expressing the inner turmoil common at this stage of development.

Respond with empathy rather than anger. Imagine walking in your teen's shoes. Reflect on what you were like as a teen. Start conversations focused on underlying emotions rather than just outward behaviors.

With empathy and mutual understanding as your foundation, you'll be able to navigate disciplinary issues in a calm, constructive way.

## Adjust Your Approach

Parenting strategies that worked wonders with your 12-year-old may be ineffective with your 16-year-old. Teens are seeking more autonomy and less parental control. Yet they still need guidance, whether or not they'll admit it.



Aim to act as a mentor, not just a disciplinarian. Offer advice when asked and when your teen seems receptive. Pick your battles and focus rules on issues of safety and family integrity. Otherwise, look for opportunities to guide versus dictate—conversations over lectures. Your teen will increasingly look to friends and social media influencers. Strive to remain someone they respect and turn to for support when needed.

Parenting adolescents in today's world certainly isn't easy, but having the right mindsets and using effective strategies can ease the way. Armed with empathy, flexibility, and tools to understand and connect with your teens, you can establish a foundation of trust. This will help carry them—and you—through the challenging adolescent years. Remember, this too shall pass. Stay consistent in your support and know that your guidance is making a lifelong difference, even when it may not seem so day-to-day.