

CONNECTING WITH YOUR TEEN

Creating a strong relationship with your young person will not only build their confidence but also provide them with a sense of safety and security.

Tips For Building Positive Relationships With Young People

- Be a good role model. Act in ways you expect of your young person – they may react if they feel there is a double standard.
- Ensure limits are reasonable. It may help to set limits and consequences together so your young person feels accountable and involved.
- Talk about risks and consequences. Encourage them to choose healthy risks like travel or sports rather than drinking or smoking.
- Support them to express their feelings safely and creatively. This might include art, music, writing, or participating in groups or sports.
- Respect their privacy and give them some space – this is important for young people in developing their sense of self. Of course, this is for instances where you do not have concerns about their safety.

It is also important for young people to spend time with their friends to develop their own social skills and individual support networks.

Time Together

It is normal for young people to want to spend time with their friends and is important for them to build their own networks and develop social skills. As a carer you may need to be adaptable in how you spend time together as the relationship changes.

Often the most rewarding activities to do with your teen are the everyday tasks that allow time for connection. You may like to try:

- Going somewhere that they like, such as a shopping centre or café.
- Eating together – going out for a lunch or dinner can be a great opportunity to talk about interests or share things from your day.
- Driving your young person somewhere. This can encourage more open conversation than when you are sitting down looking at each other in a focused space.





You can help your young person stay involved in the relationship by maintaining consistent expectations and boundaries.

Positive Communication

Good communication is critical through the teenage years and extends beyond just the words you use. Your phrasing, tone of voice and body language will all impact how your young person reacts to you. Consider how you are communicating your message and how you would feel if you were being spoken to in the same way.

Be Approachable

By remaining open and calm young people will be more willing to tell you what is happening in their lives at times of both good and not so good news.

Don't pressure your young person to talk if they are not feeling comfortable. Just let them know that they can come to you at any time and you will care for them no matter what they tell you.

Be A Good Listener

Try to avoid jumping in with advice or a lecture. Not only can this stop your young person from saying what's on their mind but can also prevent them from finding their own solutions and ways of coping with things.

Solve Problems Together

Trying to solve problems together can assist in finding a solution that works well for both of you. It also teaches young people to think about consequences.

Some questions you may like to ask yourself include:

- "What is the problem for each of us?"
- "Can we think of some creative solutions that work well for both of us?"
- "Which is the *one* best idea?"
- "What will we do if things don't go to plan?"

This can also be a valuable way of teaching young people that there are many things in their life which are within their control. There are safe ways of 'having a go'!

Praise And Criticism

Research indicates praise that is sincere is important for developing your young person's self-motivation to work harder, learn and explore. Young people who are praised often also have a more healthy outlook on their own abilities.

Some tips for giving fair praise and criticism:

- Affirm! Use verbal reinforcement to praise good choices wherever you can.
- Avoid making comparisons with others as this can send a message that they are not good enough.
- Praise, or criticise, behaviours and effort rather than personality. We want to avoid making your young person feel anxious about living up to being 'good' or 'clever' all of the time.

Dealing With Anger

It is important for young people to learn that it is normal to feel emotions like anger and also that there are safe ways to express anger without hurting themselves or others.

When they have calmed down, it can be helpful to sit down with your young person and talk about what has caused the anger for them.

Remember to role model safe ways of managing stress and anger.

For more tips on how to communicate with teenagers have a look at this interactive guide on Talking to Teens:
http://raisingchildren.net.au/communicating/talking_to_teens.html

Reducing Conflict

As young people grow they often start to challenge authority and limits as they start to develop their own views and opinions. Try to focus on the immediate matter, rather than bringing up old issues.

You can also set a good example by admitting when you are wrong as it teaches young people that it is alright to admit to mistakes. We all make them!

Stay calm by actively thinking about what's going through your mind. You may act more combatively by thinking things like "I don't deserve to be spoken to like this." Instead, remind yourself that your young person is struggling and needs your support to express how they are feeling in safe ways.

Set Limits Together

Boundaries are more likely to be effective if young people feel they have had ownership in setting them. Listening to your young person when setting limits is also empowering and teaches them that their voice is heard and valued.

Work limits and consequences out together when things are calm and you are able to agree. This will be more productive if things break down later.

Remember to be flexible at stressful times such as exams or the break down of a friendship or romance. You will also need to adjust the boundaries as your young person becomes more independent and responsible.

It is important to set equal and age-appropriate boundaries for your Time for Kids child and own children to ensure your young person feels included. They are more likely to respond to boundaries if they feel included by the family.

Technology

Technology, and in particular the internet and mobile phones, are used by young people to stay connected with friends and for fun. Being aware of how your young person uses technology is important so that you can talk about safety and ways of avoiding risks.

It may help to avoid conflict by learning more yourself about the use of digital technology. You may also like to:

- Make agreements about time limits and ways you can keep an eye on their use to ensure they're safe.
- Only allow young people to access the internet on computers or iPads in family areas where you can monitor their searches.

- Set parental controls to ensure they don't accidentally stumble upon inappropriate content when young.

Don't forget that as your young person develops and becomes more mature your agreements should change accordingly to meet their needs.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure during adolescence is a common concern for parents and carers. It generally involves your young person choosing to do things because they want to belong and have acceptance, rather than necessarily being forced to do something against their will.

There are many benefits to young people having a peer group as it becomes a major source of security and independence. Young people also often learn to take positive risks and form their own identity, as well as develop critical social skills for later in life.

It's natural to worry about a peer group influencing your young person to do things they don't want, or your young person having difficulty saying 'no'. The best thing you can do is maintain honest communication and let your young person know you understand the pressures that are on them. Support them to be their confident self by being open to discussing any issues.

Try not to criticise your young person's friends – the young person you care for might feel like you are criticising them (or their judgement)!

You can also prepare your young person by having conversations about how they might respond if feeling pressured to make risky choices.

For more information on why internet safety matters and ways to encourage young people to be safe users of digital technology at different ages, see the following resources:

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/screen_time.html

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/internet_safety.html/context/481

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/computers_preschoolers.html/context/480

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/computers_schoolage.html/context/481

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/digital_citizenship.html

Please contact Time for Kids if you have concerns that a peer group may be influencing your young person to break the law. This includes if your young person's actions go beyond general disapproval and become an issue of getting them into serious trouble that may impact their future.

Consequences

Be clear about acceptable behaviours in your family right from the very beginning and why they are important to you. It is very important to then follow through with consequences when rules are broken. Although your young person may resist, even if you have agreed on the consequences previously, it will be more difficult to follow through with later if you do not remain firm and consistent today.

If you have concerns, remember to challenge particular behaviours rather than your young person, just as you would with praise. Always give them a chance to try again.

If you "lose it", get it back!

Losing your cool by shouting or threatening sends a message that no one is in control. Young people are likely to respond to this by mimicking the behaviour, or bailing out completely.

If you begin to feel angry:

- Allow yourself to feel angry. Make sure you remove yourself from the situation and your young person first.
- Ask yourself why this is bothering you so much. Is it your young person's actions, or are you feeling angry because of what you're interpreting their action to mean?
- Give yourself a moment to calm down so that you are able to respond without anger. Try a breathing or counting exercise.
- Stay open to your young person's perspective.
- Focus on creating a solution. Talk about what you can change in the future.

Staying connected

As young people transition into adulthood it may feel as though they are less interested in spending time with you. Although it is important for young people to explore new social relationships, a strong relationship with the positive adults in their life is critical to feeling safe and secure through the challenges of adolescence.

Being responsible and available to your young person you care for will assist you to maintain closeness through this time. The best opportunities for connecting happen in everyday interactions, such as when your young person starts a conversation with you. Focus on your moment together and give them your full attention. They will benefit from just knowing that you're available when they need you.

It is natural for all relationships to change over time and so might your relationship with your young person as they navigate the challenges of trying to grow into confident and capable adults. You may need to try taking different approaches to visits with your young person as they mature. Some ideas for catching up with your teenager include:

- Chat while you're driving to take your young person somewhere.
- You may like to try more phone calls, text messages and emails, along with shorter or less frequent visits. This lets your young person know you are still thinking of them. Technology can be a great way to stay connected as the relationship evolves.
- Let your young person choose the activity – and working to a budget also assists in developing essential life skills!

Don't give up. Although it might take some persistence, you will see the benefits from continuing your time together.

The young person you care for will also need your support and guidance as they develop independent living skills. For tips and more information see Resource 6: "Transitions: Preparing Your Child For Independence".

Time for Kids' carer resources are available to download from www.timeforkids.com.au.

To discuss any issues raised in this resource, please call us on 8440 8500.

The Department for Communities and Social Inclusion has contributed funds towards this project.

