

|| CHECKLIST ||



by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator

Teenagers

10 strategies for raising teens

Adolescents want increased independence but it must come with increased responsibility.

Maurice Balson "Becoming Better Parents"



-  **1. Hand over power and responsibility to teenagers.**
Essentially our job as parents is to make ourselves redundant. This means we let young people take increasing responsibility for their own well-being. It means they increasingly make decisions for themselves however, they need to experience the consequences of their choices so they can improve and adjust their decisions and behaviour accordingly.
-  **2. Set limits for identity formation (as well as safety).**
When your young person was small you set limits and boundaries to keep him or her safe and also to teach him about the rights of others. Now that you have an adolescent the purpose of limits has broadened to include identity formation. He or she is trying to work out who the hell they are, and what are they capable of doing. This identity formation involves an element of risk, but needs to occur within an open field of choices. A young person sorts through choices, tries a few and embraces some.
-  **3. Use choices and consequences like a good cop.**
The key to using choices and consequences effectively is to use them like a good cop, not a bad or rude cop. Be calm, be pleasant, and be dispassionate when you use them. You want young people to be mad at themselves, not at you. If you are angry or implement consequences in a vindictive manner young people will more than likely be angry with you, not themselves.
-  **4. Use a problem-solving approach individually.**
One way of dealing with teenagers is using a problem-solving approach. That is, you state the rule: "I need you home safely by.....o'clock." And then follow up saying, "Let's come up with some ways to make this work for you and me." Then generate some ideas and pick a solution and try it. Talk in a week or two to see if it is working.
-  **5. Mess with their minds – use facts, not scare tactics.**
Generation Y's live in each other's pockets and they tend to reflect each other's views, which are often narrow and lack some historical perspective. It is useful then for older generations to let their views be known to provide Gen whY's with a different perspective. It needs to be done in a way that is not self indulgent and that doesn't lecture - with tact and guile.
-  **6. Communicate as if you are going for a job interview.**
A professional communicator doesn't need to have all the answers. They are confident enough to admit that they don't know and they allow themselves some time to figure out a better response. A professional communicator knows that remaining calm, choosing words carefully or deferring decisions means that they are more likely to be listened to, and that they will make safer decisions.
-  **7. Choose your battles wisely – don't sweat the small stuff!**
The trick to living cooperatively with teenagers is not to fight with them over the minor events. It is easy to become caught up in battles over relatively inconsequential issues such as bedroom tidiness and appearance, or school uniforms, which are inconsequential in the broader scheme of life. The trouble with sweating over the small stuff is that relationships are damaged with young people over issues of relatively little importance. It also drains energy away so that when



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there really is a need to hold some ground over an important issue such as a young person coming home at a reasonable time from a party there is just nothing left to fight with.

8. Open up the door to mentors and the wider community.

It is not uncommon for today's young to have very limited access to broader family members and have weak ties to cousins, aunts and extended family members. This model is ultimately doomed to failure as the developmental task for a young person is about rejecting one's mother and father before moving on to adulthood. In more traditional societies, it was the extended family, rather than parents that helped young people make the transition to adulthood.

The great challenge for all adults, whether parents or broader community, is to engage with young people in ways that are meaningful, challenging and relevant. We can use artificial means such as providing mentors, which are uncle and aunty substitutes or just make a concerted effort to encourage them to interact with other generations.

9. Talk to other parents.

It is also helpful to talk with other parents to find out if your teenager's behaviour is normal and within the realms of acceptability. "So your son spends a lot of time on his own in his room. How long do you wait until you try to lure him out?" It just helps sometimes to check with parents of teenagers of the same age. Find out about the issues that they may be dealing with.

Talk to other parents when:

- You are unsure of party or group activity details
- You want to check that your child has a proper grasp of some details
- You are having a difficult time as a parent
- Your teenager is beginning a new phase of his or her life and you need some hints

10. Don't let them drop out of the family.

Spending time in bedrooms is just one way young people can drop out of their family. Refusing to attend family functions, celebrations or even mealtimes are also common ways of dropping out. It is useful for parents to negotiate with young people about the types of events that young people are expected to attend and those that they can pass by. It is helpful to know which events are negotiable and which are non-negotiable. For instance, it maybe that study or work commitments may excuse them from attending grandma's birthday but they don't excuse them from missing a siblings' birthday.

Young people risk falling through the cracks when they remove themselves from family-life.

Strong families work out ways for its members to stay in touch on a regular basis that suits everyone.

Adolescents and sleep

Many teenagers are sleep deprived. They need a minimum of nine hours sleep, but it seems, many get only 7 ½ hours sleep per night. Sleep cannot be accumulated for the future. A young person can't sleep for twelve hours to put some hours in the sleep bank. They can, however, sleep for twelve hours when they are sleep deprived.

The biological sleep clock shifts for young people. Up till age 10 kids tend to wake up fresh and ready for the day. For teens their clock has shifted. Many wake up feeling tired and irritable as their sleep clock says they should still be sleeping early in the morning. For most teens there is a 'forbidden sleep zone' around 9 or 10 o'clock at night. They are alive and alert at these times. Ironically, as their parents move toward middle age their sleep clocks shift forward and they just want to sleep at these times. Teens tend to have a sleep trough in the afternoon but peak up at night. Many sleep researchers in the United States are pushing for later school start times in secondary school to maximise alert times for learning

Sleep helps consolidate learning. Sleep research has shown that the brain practises and consolidates what it has learned during the day when they are asleep. So not only does sufficient sleep help future learning by ensuring a student is fresh, it consolidates past learning.

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