

Skills for Good Parenting: High School and Beyond - You, Your Child and the World

Children learn from their environment and from what they are exposed to. Once you, the parent, have a handle on what matters to you as a family, teachable moments surround you. When your child is young, this isn't too hard. However, as children grow and they distance themselves from their family, you will have to work a little harder.

In this age of social media and electronic entertainment, your teen is being exposed to things you never even dreamt of when you were his age – some good, some horrifying. As your adolescent shifts his alliance from his family to his peers, don't let up on keeping abreast of what he is seeing/reading/playing. If your daughter spends hours along in her bedroom streaming shows on Netflix, go on Netflix yourself, and watch the shows your teen has been watching. You may not be welcome to watch them with her, but you can certainly remain aware of what it is she is watching. And when you find something that raises concerns, you need to follow up with a discussion about that topic. Recently, many teens watched "13 Reasons Why". If you didn't watch it together, you can still talk to her about the show's content or issues raised. If you want some guidance or insight into media content, Commonsensemedia.com is a great resource for getting a sense of content and what is age appropriate.

Your teen is already active on social media, but that doesn't mean there shouldn't be rules and expectations. Set parameters. Your teen has a life on the web that you probably know very little about, and there are multiple areas of concern– that their interactions on social media reflect your family's values (no cyberbullying!!!), that they remain safe as they potentially interact with strangers who might be predators, and that their online identity will endure and might jeopardize future college plans or career opportunities. While your teen will resist friending you, perhaps you can find a trusted adult friend or relative who can alert you to any inappropriate or dangerous online behavior. And you need to find a way to talk to your teen about social media that allows you to talk about the issues without appearing to invade their privacy. Perhaps there's a story in the news about one of the current hot platforms that you can discuss with them. Or you can ask them to show you how to use it, just like they tried so many times to teach you how to program your remote.

One important lesson to teach at any age is that a person's online identity belongs to HER, and a simple way to teach this is to ask her permission before you post her photo, or information about her accomplishments, on your Facebook page or Instagram account. This will help her dissuade friends from inappropriate or embarrassing posts or tags. For example, she needs to be able to recognize when photos shouldn't be posted and she should be able to ask her friends not to post those photos. And of course, it's important that your teen learns how to interact online responsibly, both to protect themselves and to be a good on-line citizen.

As your maturing child engages with the outside world, talk about the news and issues that you are hearing about or that family members are involved with. Listen to what your teen is saying. Use open ended questions to try to get them to open up. You can even choose family movie

night selections that might start a conversation. Be honest about what you believe and why and why you want them to do (or not do) something.

All along the way, find ways to act on your beliefs, with or without your child.

Remember that you are always on stage for them. Swearing at another driver, using your cell phone in the car, volunteering at a soup kitchen, getting involved in politics, being conscientious about recycling are all absorbed. Talk to your kids about being a global citizen and what this means. Don't be afraid to use yourself as an example whether of what's happening in your day to day life now or of when you were growing up.

Sometimes it may seem that your teen rejects all of your "good advice", but give it time. It may take 3, 5 or 10 years, but there is a good chance that they will do you proud.

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