

# PARENTING

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# TIPS

## Raising Adolescent Children (Part 2)

*Some key ideas to keep in mind in leading your adolescent children toward responsible adulthood.*

Bear in mind the powerful influence of body chemistry on an adolescent's emotions and judgment. They are often uncertain, impulsive, overly sensitive, especially at ages 13, 15, and 17. In many ways, the mood swings of adolescence are like those that children display at ages two to five, and are largely caused by the same growth spurts and hormonal currents within them. So they need the same things they needed from you in their earliest years. They need you to be certain, confidently directive, patient, affectionate, understanding, and fair. They also need nutritious food and plenty of sleep.

Make clear that you want and expect personal best effort, not just results: that they try their best in studies and try to comply with reasonable house rules. Make the rules in your house start with the word "We...."-- Not, "You must be in by 11:30," but rather, "We all get in at a decent hour." Not, "You must clean up your room," but rather, "We all pitch in to make this house clean and pleasant." Not, "You must apologize," but rather, "We all apologize when we've offended anyone." Give them credit for trying. Be patient.

When you must correct your teens, try to adhere to the same standards you live by when dealing with other adults:

- No public rebukes; whenever possible, correct privately.
- No snap judgments: listen to their side of things. Respect their right to presumption of innocence.
- Don't rub it in. Never say, "I told you so," or "If only you'd listened to me...."
- If emotions are getting out of control, put off discussion till later: "Let's talk about this tomorrow night." (Waiting is itself a sort of punishment.)
- If you've overreacted, go back and apologize. They will respect your desire to be fair: you try to put justice and truth ahead of your pride.



I've got three teenagers.... better give me one of everything you've got.

In worst-case scenarios, you may rely on restrictions on use of the telephone, restrictions on driver's license and use of car.

Do not underestimate how much you have learned--how much experience and wisdom you can teach them. Start with these questions: What do I know now that I did not know at age 16, and wish I did? Based on my own experience (successes and mistakes) and what I've seen in others' lives, what can I teach my teens about responsible adult life--making the most of school, finding what you're good at and planning a career, finding or changing a job, dating and courtship, being a loving and supportive husband and wife, social graces, dealing with friends, sizing up people, staying in shape, overcoming worries, turning out excellent work, professionalism and professional etiquette, setting priorities and managing time, planning and meeting goals, managing finances, shopping intelligently, knowing malarkey when you see it, staying informed about public affairs, living as a responsible and engaged citizen.

How can you tell that you are making progress with your children, that they are really growing up, especially in their early teens? In several ways...

- They are aware of the rights and feelings of others, and act this way.
- They have a habit of work, putting their powers up against problems. In family life, they are conscious of being needed. That is, they know the meaning of *responsibility*: if we don't do our duty, someone else will suffer.
- They live like producers, not consumers.
- They can take care of others, and want to.
- Most of the time, in a host of situations, they do the right thing without being told.
- When they've done wrong, they know it, and they apologize. They readily accept the apologies of others, and they forget as well as forgive.
- They say, and mean, *please* and *thank you* and *I'm sorry*.
- They keep their promises. They will endure hardship rather than break their word.
- Most of their blunders come not from ill will or selfishness, but rather from lack of experience. By and large, they try to do the right thing.
- Deep down, they know their parents' corrections come from love: they sense that their parents correct them *because* they love them.
- They refrain from whatever would disgrace their family.
- They choose friends of upright character.
- Their prayers are addressed to God as a person. So they see sin as a rupture of their personal friendship with God, an offense calling for apology and amendment.
- People outside the family--friends and neighbors--compliment the parents for their children's character.

Remember that your children may forget most of the details of what you teach them, but they will remember what was *important* to you. For most of us, the lifelong voice of conscience is the voice of our parents.

**Source:** Website of James B. Stenson, educational consultant: [www.ParentLeadership.com](http://www.ParentLeadership.com).

James Stenson will be speaking in Melbourne on 7 September and Sydney on 9 September 2005.

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