

# TEN TIPS FOR PARENTS OF TEENAGERS



- 1 Have a code word with your teen:** If your teen finds themselves at a party where alcohol, drugs, or sexual activities are going on, they may want to leave without “losing face.” If you create a code word in advance, they can call you and say, “Is Grandma okay?” which really means, “I think I should leave this situation. Can you come get me?”
- 2 Timing counts for conversations:** Talk to your teen in the car where they don’t have to look directly at you; this can help them to open up. Or, try talking to your teen at night when they are falling asleep; their defenses will be down. When your teen opens up, your job is to listen.
- 3 Choose your battles:** Don’t fight about hairstyles, music and clothes. Show concern over falling or poor grades. Take control over safety and health issues; drugs, alcohol, sex and violence require firm and clear limits.
- 4 Teen brains are wired for risk-taking:** Teen brains are not fully developed in terms of judgment, analysis, and risk assessment. It is developmentally appropriate for a teenager to explore, push boundaries and take risks. Teens need your guidance.
- 5 Teenagers are more prone to addiction:** A child who starts a neuro-addictive behavior (such as drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes) at age 14 has an exponentially increased risk of becoming an addict as an adult.
- 6 Help teenagers develop their intuition:** Ask him to listen to the voice inside, rather than following what his peers are doing. Ask your teen what his idea of the “next best action” would be, so he gets used to listening to his inner voice in any given situation.
- 7 Birth control does not condone having sex:** The USA has one of highest incidents of pregnancy of any industrialized nation. American teens are not getting information about sexual and reproductive health as readily as they need.
- 8 Teach your teenager financial literacy:** Get your teen a checkbook and have her pay her cell phone bill. Co-sign on a credit card and make sure your teen pays it off each month.
- 9 College planning starts early:** Different colleges require different pre-requisite classes; when your child is in ninth grade, have him see the guidance counselor to find out what classes are needed for the college or university that he is interested in.
- 10 Tips for the college essay:** The college essay completes the college application; more than grades, test scores and recommendations, the essay fills in the passion, interest and personality of the student.

*The following Kids in the House interviews contributed to this “Ten Tips for Parents of Teenagers:” Dave Roberts, CPA, Judy Willis, MD, M.Ed, Lauren Weiss, PhD, Michael Bradley, EdD, Michael Dennis, PhD, Michael Riera, PhD, and Minerva Cano.*