

Strengthening Connections Between Parents and Teenagers during COVID-19



Understanding Attachment and Development

Did you know that for teens, a strong connection to their parents is *just as important* as their normal pursuit of independence? This connection is even more critical at times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 crisis.

Attachment, or connection between parent and child, is a safety net for healthy development. When our children are securely attached to us, they feel free to explore their environment and develop new relationships. They also feel comfortable coming to us for help when they need it. A secure bond provides a good balance of comfort, safety and support for learning new things about the world.

It is never too late to strengthen even the most secure parent-child relationships.

Tips for Parents

Parental empathy is essential throughout all our children's development.

- 1 Be an active listener when you communicate with your teen.**
Focus more on understanding what your teen is really trying to say than on winning points in disagreements.
- 2 Find and honor the value in what your teen says and does, even if you perceive things differently than your child.**
“I understand you want to meet up with your friends because they're important to you and they should be. How can you be with them online until it's safe to get together face to face?”
- 3 Before an exchange starts to get too heated, figuratively take two steps back, breathe deeply and think about the true meaning of your teen's words and actions.**
Is your teen unwittingly seeking “connection” or independence? Match a kind and thoughtful response with your understanding.

Understand that there are ups and downs in all relationships. In meaningful relationships, anticipate two steps forward and one step backwards. Hang in there!

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Tips for Teens

- 1 Learn to approach your parents about controversial issues at the right time in the right place.**
The times when your mom or dad are in the middle of a stack of paperwork or busily cooking dinner may not be the best time to talk about certain issues. Use good judgement.
- 2 Keep your cool and demonstrate respect, even if your parents start to “lose it.”**
Remember that your parents are people with feelings too, and they can experience anxious feelings sometimes.
- 3 Be clear about what you are asking when you approach your parents and why.**
This will help you learn to communicate more effectively.
- 4 Remember that no one always gets everything they hope for.**
Coping well with both success and disappointment is a skill that will serve you well, not just during this crisis but throughout your life.

A Few Last Thoughts

Normal child development is a dynamic process, bringing both joy and bumps in the road. During times of stress, such as COVID-19, the challenges to parents and teens are magnified significantly. Cultivating strong internal assets, such as good decision-making skills, motivation to achieve, a sense of purpose, etc., and external assets, such as family support, a caring school climate, positive peer influence, etc. help to promote well-being and good citizenship.

Why not try to use this current time as an opportunity to relate and communicate successfully as a family and to work on developing these assets?

Check out these good resources if you would like to learn more.

[Empathy](#)

[40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents](#)