Keeping Your Cool When Parenting Teens

Adolescence is a difficult time for young people. During those years, they face physical changes; peer pressure; exposure to drugs, alcohol and sexual relationships; and increased expectations and scrutiny from parents and teachers.

But, as difficult as it is being a teenager, being a parent of one is even harder.

After years of being the primary influence on their children, parents of teens suddenly find their kids are more interested in what their friends think and do. And, depending on the child, outright rebellion against family rules and values can take a painful toll.

The following strategies from the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth can help you keep your cool and your love intact during your children's teen years.
• Learn about adolescent development. Knowing what behaviors to expect can help you prepare for parenting challenges.

• Look back at your own teen years. Remembering your own moods, risk-taking activities and attitudes toward your parents and adults can help you understand teen behavior.

• Consider taking a teen-parenting course. Look for one taught by someone with experience in child development or who has spent time counseling teens. Expect to learn from the instructor and other parents facing similar challenges.

• Use positive reinforcement. Criticism and excessive punishment, including words that belittle, can hurt a teen’s self-esteem, thereby increasing rebellious behavior. When parent-child communication is characterized by warmth, kindness, consistency and love, the relationship will flourish, as will self-esteem, cooperation and respect.

• Teach your teen that rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. Give your child increasing responsibility for his or her well-being and that of the family.

• Include your child in discussions involving setting rules and establishing consequences for breaking them. This will increase the chance your teen will respect his or her boundaries most of the time.

Finding a balance

The most difficult thing about monitoring a teen is maintaining the balance between too much and too little control. Just as it requires setting firm limits when it would be easier to let things slide, it also requires parents to be continually vigilant to ensure they know where their children are and what they’re doing.

• Help your child move toward independence. Parents who encourage independent thought and expression in their children often find they’re raising children who have a healthy sense of self and an enhanced ability to resist peer pressure.

• Spend quality and quantity time with your child. Teens begin to pull away from their families and spend more time with friends. But time spent with their parents is important to their emotional development. Stay involved in your child’s outside interests; attend his or her school and extracurricular activities.

• Encourage other adults, including friends and relatives, to spend time with your child. Aunts and uncles or adult neighbors can offer your child support and guidance.

When teens need help

All teens need daily support and guidance, but some need extra help from outside the family.

Early intervention is crucial in reducing the damage serious problems might cause. Signs your child might need help include:

• Spending a lot of time alone
• Sudden drop in school performance
• Drastic mood swings or changes in behavior
• Separation from longtime friends
• Lack of interest in hobbies or social and recreational activities
• Drug or alcohol abuse

If talking with your child doesn't improve the situation, seek support and guidance from school resources or mental health professionals.

_Krames Staywell_

**Good Night, Sleep Tight**

Dim the lights, lower the shades, breathe deeply and slide under the covers. It's bedtime. But as your body begins to relax, your mind starts to race. Did you get everything done today? What's in store for tomorrow?

Meanwhile, your eyes get adjusted to the dark. Before you know it, you are wide-awake. Sleep? No way -- there's too much to think about.

Insomnia, trouble falling asleep or trouble sleeping, is a growing problem in the United States. Studies show that many Americans don't get enough sleep because of stress, anxiety and bad sleep habits. Sure, a presentation or an interview the next day can make you toss and turn. But if insomnia lasts more than a week, or if you often experience daytime sleepiness, call your doctor. In most cases, you can put your sleeplessness to rest with good sleep habits.

**How Much Is Enough?**

Medical experts suggest anywhere say 6-8 hours for adults and up to 10 hours for children and adolescents. But according to the National Sleep Foundation, one in three adults gets six hours of sleep or less. How do you know if you're getting enough sleep? Listen to your body. Falling asleep at a
symphony or at the movies isn't necessarily a sign that the event is boring. It's a sign that you're not getting enough sleep.

**Don't Skip Sleep**

With increasing activities, many people stay awake into the early hours of the morning. Most people think that sleep is easy to give up. They don't realize the negative effects that cutting down on sleep can have. In addition to feeling sleepy during the day, lack of sleep can cause memory and concentration problems, slower reflexes, and difficulty getting along with others. In some cases, lack of sleep can be deadly. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that drowsy drivers cause thousands of car crashes each year.

If you need help getting to sleep at night, check out the following tips. And the next time you snuggle between the sheets, enjoy a sound, refreshing sleep.

**Tips for Getting Sound Sleep**

- Avoid caffeine for six hours and alcohol and nicotine for two to three hours before bedtime.
- Don't exercise too close to your bedtime. It is best if you finish exercising at least four hours before bedtime. Exercise raises your body's temperature, which can prevent or delay sleep. In the evening your body temperature naturally drops, which triggers a sleepy feeling.
- Clear your mind of the day's stress. Take a few minutes to talk about the day. Or, try making lists to help clear your mind of the day's stress. That way, when you get into bed, you will be able to focus on dozing, not doing. Deep breathing or relaxation exercises may help lull your body to sleep. If you can't sleep, get up and do something that's not very stimulating until you feel sleepy.
- Control your exposure to light. Darkness is a cue for your body to sleep. Use night-lights if you need to go to the bathroom or if you often wake up during the night. Bright lights can interrupt the body's natural sleep pattern.
- Turn alarm clocks toward the wall. Waking up in the middle of the night and checking the time may increase anxiety and prevent you from getting back to sleep.
- Wake up at the same time every day. Your body will respond well to a consistent cycle.
- Talk with your doctor before you resort to using any kind of sleeping pills whether prescription or over-the-counter.

*Krames Staywell*
Will Basics

You definitely need a will if you have children. Even if you don’t have children, you probably need a will.

Each state has formal requirements for preparing and signing a will.

Generally:
- You must declare that the document you’re signing is your will
- Your signature must be witnessed by at least two or three witnesses, who must sign the will in each other’s presence
- Each state has specific requirements for how your signature and the signatures of the witnesses must be worded

Types of Wills

A holographic will is handwritten, without witnesses. Few states recognize holographic wills, and only in very particular circumstances.

Oral wills, also called “nuncupative wills,” are only recognized in a few states and usually only in compelling situations such as the impending death of a soldier in wartime.

A self-proving will is one that has been witnessed and signed with all the formalities required by state law. A self-proving will saves a great deal of time and effort when it turns out that one or more witnesses can’t be located or are themselves deceased.

What Should My Will Include?

Your will should detail:
- That you are of sound mind as you are reading and signing the will
- The names, locations and dates of birth of your immediate family, including your spouse and all children, including adopted children. Talk with your lawyer about whether to name illegitimate children and stepchildren to avoid claims that you have simply left them out and would have provided for them if you'd been thinking of them.
• Appointment of a guardian and alternate guardian for any minor children. Your lawyer will be able to tell you whether you should have a separate guardian to manage their finances.
• A list of who should inherit specific items of property. In some states, this is handled more informally with a separate list that can be frequently updated, which is kept with the will.
• What will happen to any remaining property not specifically mentioned by you
• Who will be your "executor", the person responsible for carrying out the directions you leave in your will, such as distributing the property and paying any debts and taxes

Where Should I Keep My Will?

A will should be kept in a safe place such as a bank safe deposit box or fireproof safe at home, where it can be easily located after your death.

If you keep your will in a safe deposit box, you'll need to arrange for your executor to have access to the box after your death. Many states put a freeze on a safe deposit box at death, which makes it more difficult to retrieve the will.

When Should I Update My Will?

Your will should be updated whenever:
• You marry or divorce
• You give birth to or adopt a child
• When a family member or other beneficiary of your estate dies
• When someone you've named as an executor, trustee or guardian is no longer able to fulfill that role
• When you decide to change an executor, trustee or guardian
• When you want to change the way your property will be distributed
• When you move to another state
• When your net worth increases dramatically

Revising a Will

A will can be revised by:
• Making minor changes in what's called a "codicil," a formal amendment to the will
• Preparing an entirely new will revoking the prior will
• Independent events such as divorce or adoption. State laws vary as to the effect these events may have on the validity of your will.

Although making a will is a sobering experience, your loved ones and friends will thank you for being so organized and thoughtful ahead of time.

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