

## Connect with Your Teen, Positively

The desire to connect with others is universal, which is why social media has exploded over the years among people of all ages. When it comes to teens, just about everyone has at least one social media account to connect with their “friends” at any given moment. A child’s virtual and in-person connections are important and highly influential in their lives. However, it cannot compare to the importance and influence of the parent-child connection.

It’s the relationship between the parent/caregiver and the child that serves as the foundation of present and future interactions with others and highly impacts how young people make decisions. The parent-child relationship must be strengthened for healthy adolescent development. Children whose relationships with their parents can be characterized as consistent, warm, kind, loving, and stable, are much more likely to:

- initiate positive social interactions with others
- respond to situations with empathy
- be cooperative with others
- exhibit a higher self-esteem
- make healthy life choices, including the decision not to use alcohol and other drugs

Adolescence is a time of many changes and big decision-making. Be sure to talk regularly, remain engaged in your child’s everyday life, and continuously strive to strengthen the connection. A strong and positive relationship now will serve you and your child both today and down the road.

## How to Enhance Your Parent-Child Connection

**Spend Time Together:** Hanging out and having fun with your child is critical in building and fostering a close connection. Whether you get ice cream or spend an afternoon relaxing and watching movies at home, enjoy some “hang time” with your child.

**Include Friends:** What better way to get to know your child’s friends than bringing them along on a family outing or inviting them over for dinner? It’s also important to get to know their friends’ parents.

**Listen:** Put down your electronic devices and listen. Our kids want to be heard, and they want to feel that what they say matters to you. Listen attentively, then ask questions to show your interest.

**Talk:** Your child wants and needs to hear from you on a variety of topics, including mental wellness and substance use. Children whose parents talk early and often with them about not using alcohol and other drugs are 50% less likely to smoke, drink or use other substances.

**Set Future Goals:** Research shows that when youth set their sights on future goals, be it a position on a sports team or an academic scholarship, they make more careful choices.

**R-E-S-P-E-C-T:** It is important to both give respect to your child and insist on it from your child. This is an occasion where if you give, you are much more likely to receive.

**Share Expectations:** Most youth want to please their parents. Children whose parents set clear expectations are more likely to make better choices.

**Eat Dinner Together:** While it need not be anything fancy, studies show that sitting down together to share a meal and conversation strengthens family connections.

