

THE RESPECT CHALLENGE

10 Tips on Talking about Healthy Relationships with Teens

1. **Encourage open, honest, and thoughtful reflection.** Talk openly with young teens about healthy relationships. Allow them to articulate his or her values and expectations for healthy relationships. Rather than dismissing ideas as “wrong”, encourage debate —this helps young people come to his or her own understanding.
2. **Be sensitive and firm.** Parenting a young teen is not easy—especially when it comes to helping him or her navigate their way through relationships. To be effective, you will need to find the balance between being sensitive and firm. Try to adapt to the changes faced by your child. Be willing to talk openly and respect differences of opinion. And, realize that the decisions you make will sometimes be unpopular with your young teen.
3. **Understand teen development.** Adolescence is all about experimentation. From mood swings to risk taking, “normal teenage behavior” can appear anything-but-normal. New research, however, reveals that brain development during these formative years play a significant role in young teen’s personality and actions. Knowing what’s “normal” is critical to helping you better understand and guide young people.
4. **Understand the pressure and the risk teen’s face.** Preteens and young teens face new and increasing pressures about sex, substance abuse and dating. Time and time again, young teens express their desire to have parents/role models take the time to listen to them and help them think through the situations they face – be that person!
5. **Take a clear stand.** Make sure young teens know how you feel about disrespect, use of abusive or inappropriate language, controlling behavior, or any forms of violence,
6. **Make the most of “teachable moments”.** Use TV episodes, movies, music lyrics, news, community events or the experiences of friends to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships.
7. **Discuss how to be an ‘upstander’.** Teach teens how to stand-up for friends when he or she observes unhealthy treatment of his or her peers.
8. **Accentuate the positive.** Conversations about relationships do not need to focus solely on risky behavior or negative consequences. Conversations should also address factors that promote healthy adolescent development and relationships.
9. **Be an active participant in your young teen’s life.** Explore ways to know more about your young teen’s friends and interests. Find activities you can do together.
10. **Be prepared to make mistakes.** You *will* make mistakes. Accept that you will make mistakes, but continue to help teens make responsible choices while trying to maintain that delicate balance of being sensitive, but firm.