



Strategies for improving communication and connection with teenagers

The period of adolescence covers the ages 10-24 years (WHO). It involves significant biological growth as well as major social role transitions.

It is an essential time of emotional intensity, social engagement and creativity, which can set the foundations for what we are capable of and what we need to thrive in adulthood.

Fundamental brain changes during teenage years include:

- Novelty seeking (risk taking and impulsivity, but also sense of adventure and open to change)
- Social engagement (isolation and rejection of adults while having a drive to connect with peers which improves wellbeing)
- Emotional intensity (moodiness, reactivity, but also energy, passion and zest for life)
- Creative exploration (identity crisis and search for meaning, but increased willingness to explore and experience life)

RESOURCES

- [From Boys to Men](#)
- [Miss-Connection](#)
- [Brainstorm](#)
- [Welcome to Your Period](#)
- [Welcome to Consent](#)
- [A Girl's Guide to Puberty](#)
- [A Guy's Guide to Puberty](#)
- [Smiling Mind App](#)
- [The Resilience Project](#)

PODCASTS

- [ABC Conversations](#)
- [Parental as Anything](#)
- [Short and Curly](#) (listen to with teens)
- [Pants on Fire](#) (listen to with teens, and try to spot fake vs. real news)
- [Ask me anything](#) (listen to with teens)



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The information on this factsheet comes from a CAPS Supporting Kids parenting webinar. Supporting Kids applies a practical and strengths-based approach to teaching emotionally aware parenting. Head to our website to find out about [upcoming parenting webinars](#), and [subscribe to our newsletter](#) for free resources and the latest child protection news!





PRACTISING SUPPORTING TEENS



Mental Health

- Adolescents have an increased risk for mental illness, given the changes in brain chemicals and hormones; this looks like increase rates of psychological distress, depression and anxiety as well as self-harm, suicidal ideation and attempts.
- To support teens, caregivers can focus on healthy sleep routines, eating a balanced diet (including probiotics and prebiotics) and considering appropriate role models (online influences and “real life” connections).

Healthy Friendships and Relationships

- Males and females differ in their development of social skills and what they seek in relationships. However, during adolescence, both genders compare themselves to others, and seek to belong to a group or partner.
- If friendships and relationships are respectful (respect boundaries, inclusive of difference, trustworthy and accountable), then they promote short and long term wellbeing.
- Friendships and relationships can be toxic or unsafe due to unrealistic representations (social media, pornography, tv shows), being available 24/7 and to a broader network of influences.

Connection & Communication

- Authentic connection to family and friends predicts motivation, positivity and growth more reliably than any other factor. It relies on feeling seen, heard and valued in relationships.

- Teens are sensitive to judgement and shaming so practising COAL (Curious, Open, Accepting & Loving) during interactions, particularly when poor judgement has occurred, builds emotional safety in our relationship with them.
- Using your teen’s friends as a starting point for conversations on hard topics (e.g. substance use, sex, puberty) can increase their ability to open up or take on information.

STRATEGIES



- Consider who are support people (adult mentors and peers) in your teen’s life, and make sure your child has time to connect with them
- Build in connecting times with your teen that are predictable and involve their special interests (tv shows, DIY projects, exercise) – stay close, talk often.
- Consider what you are modelling for your teen in terms of mental health, substance use, relationships (self-esteem, self-regulation, and self-care)
- Review whether your family rules are in line with developmental expectations
- Consider how you can build a sense of safety and belonging for your teen. If you need help, where can you access that?