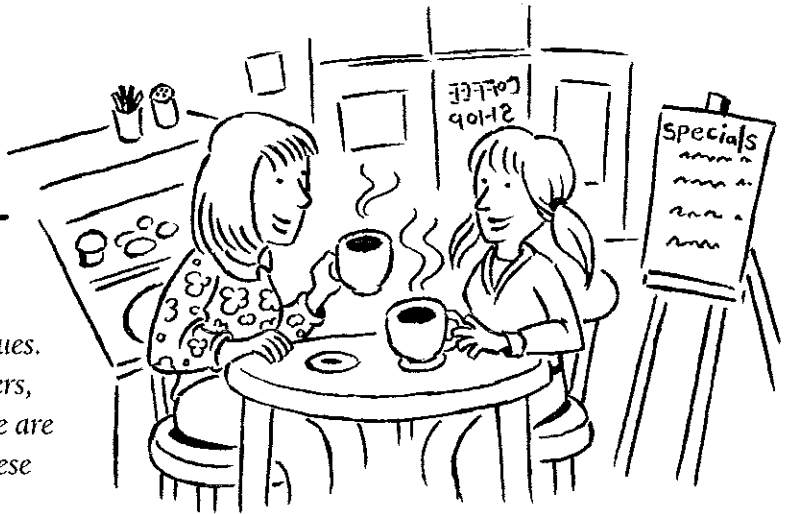


# TEEN Challenges

Today's high school students face a lot of tough issues. You want to help your teen be happy and avoid dangers, but you may not always know what to say or do. Here are practical tips for guiding your child safely through these years.



## Avoiding drugs and alcohol

One of the most important ways to protect your child from drugs and alcohol is to talk with her—honestly and often. Try these suggestions:



- Look for times when you and your teen can talk without distractions or interruptions. Maybe you could go to the coffee shop on a weekend morning or talk at bedtime when computers are off and cell phones are put away.

■ Maintain a friendly but firm tone. Clearly let your teenager know that it is never okay for her to smoke, use drugs, or drink alcohol. Discuss the serious risks of illness and addiction and the consequences for breaking the rules (being grounded, losing car privileges).

■ Teach her how to say “no.” Practice what she can say to someone who offers beer or marijuana at a party. *Example:* “No, thanks. I don’t drink. I’m in training for the track team.”

■ To get help and advice, you might meet with your child’s doctor or the school nurse. You can also call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (800-729-6686) or visit [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com). Suggest that your teen visit [www.abovetheinfluence.com](http://www.abovetheinfluence.com), where she can ask questions, read answers to other teens’ questions, and find helpful advice.

## Driving safely

Teenagers have the highest collision rate of any group of drivers, and teens with a year or less of experience have the worst crash rates. How can you help keep your youngster safe?

■ Drive the way you want your teen to drive—he will take his cue from you. Obey traffic rules, and be courteous to other drivers. Point out when you let another driver in, and be sure not to display anger if someone cuts you off.

■ As your child is learning to drive, take him out in all different conditions (heavy traffic, back roads, highways, rain, snow, bright sunshine, dusk, nighttime). Correct mistakes calmly, and give praise when he does well.

■ Limit risk factors. Ban distractions such as cell phones, loud music, and eating. Help your high schooler concentrate on driving by not allowing friends in the car (*note:* some states restrict this now). Also, set an early driving curfew, since late-night driving can be dangerous for teens.

■ Spell out consequences for traffic violations, and stick to them. If your teen gets a ticket, make him responsible for paying it. You might take away the privilege of driving alone until he has shown you he can drive safely.

■ Set rules about who your child can ride with. You might not let him ride with a friend who’s had his license less than a year. Or you might only allow him in a car with a new driver when there are no other passengers.

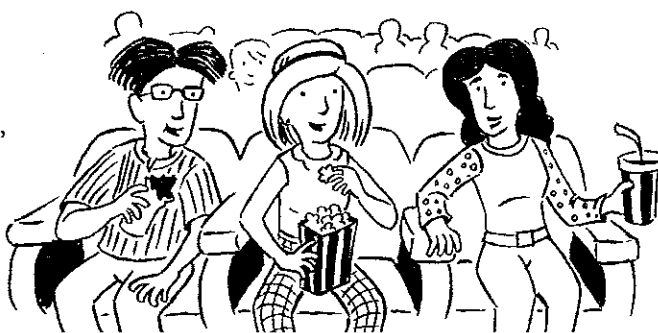
*Note:* Consider writing a driving contract with your teen. Your motor vehicle administration office might have a sample, or find one at [www.aaatexchange.com/Assets/Files/2007214956500.Parent\\_teencontract.pdf](http://www.aaatexchange.com/Assets/Files/2007214956500.Parent_teencontract.pdf).



## Standing up to peer pressure

Smoking, tattoos, body piercings, drugs, sex, and alcohol—they're all temptations kids are often exposed to. You can help your teen make smart decisions with these strategies:

- Explain that it's normal to want to fit in, but that people will respect her—and she'll respect herself—for having her own mind. Teach your high schooler to trust her instincts. If something doesn't "feel right" to her, it probably isn't.
- Suggest that she seek out friends who won't pressure her. A good way is to hang out with people who like the things she enjoys, such as movies, shopping, or sports. Also, having a friend along who feels the same way she does will help her withstand peer pressure.
- Help your teen think ahead. If she's going to be around people who have pressured her to smoke in the past, for instance, what will she say this time? When she resists peer pressure (leaves a party when kids start drinking), ask her how she feels. Chances are she will be proud of herself.
- A lack of self-confidence can cause teens to give in to peer pressure. Let your child know you're proud of her achievements. Mention positive things she does at school (takes hard courses, participates in a club) and at home (watches her little sister, starts interesting conversations at dinner).



## Tackling bullying

Whether your child is the one being bullied, doing the bullying, or standing by watching, bullying is dangerous. Bullying can take many forms, from teasing and excluding people to physical violence and cyberbullying. Here are some ways to help your teen handle bullying:



- If your child says he's being bullied, take the problem seriously. Contact a teacher or school counselor who can help him cope and be on the lookout for problems. Encourage your teen to avoid bullies and to tell an adult if he feels threatened. Identify a safe place (areas in school where teachers or staff are present, a neighbor's house) where he can go.
- If you suspect your teen is bullying others, try to find out why (you might discover that he feels badly about himself or learn that he's been bullied in the past). Encourage him to feel empathy for others. You may ask, "How would you feel if someone

were saying mean things about you to others?" Finally, let him know that you won't tolerate bullying, and take action. You can seek advice from a school counselor or the principal.

- Bullies like an audience. If your teenager sees someone being bullied, encourage him not to be a bystander. He should tell an adult what's happening. Also, suggest that he be a friend to the victim and try to include the person in social activities.
- Cyberbullying can include sending malicious text messages, spreading rumors on Facebook, or forwarding inappropriate photos. Let your teen know that he should never make negative or threatening comments about anyone, and he should tell you immediately if he's a victim of cyberbullying. Remind him not to share personal information online with people he doesn't know.

## Dating advice

As your teens begin to date, help them develop healthy relationships and stay safe with these suggestions:

- Establish rules for dating. You might include curfews, places they can and cannot go, and whether they're allowed on one-on-one dates. Double dating and group dates can offer safety and less chance for pressure to do something they may not want to do.
- You'll want to meet anyone your teenagers are dating. Have dates come to your home, and spend a few minutes getting to know them. Help them feel comfortable by not "grilling" them—just talk about school, what they're doing over the summer, or other friendly topics.
- Remind your teens that they always deserve to be treated with respect. Encourage them to be aware of how their dates treat them—and also to treat their dates well. They can ask themselves questions like, "Do I feel good when I'm with him?" or "Does she bring out the best in me?"
- Don't shy away from talking with your teens about sex. Let them know they can always come to you for honest information about sex and other relationship issues. *Note:* Get help starting the conversation from Web sites (try [www.mayoclinic.com/health/sex-education/CC00032](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sex-education/CC00032)) or books like *How to Talk with Teens About Love, Relationships, & S-E-X: A Guide for Parents* (Amy G. Miron, M.S., and Charles D. Miron, Ph.D.).



## High School Years