



How to set rules and limits for your teen

Setting clear expectations and healthy boundaries with your teen will help them gain independence and build trust



Key Points

- Boundaries between you and your teen should be mutually respected.
- Make your expectations clear, as well as the reasons behind them.
- Be consistent with your expectations and the consequences.

As young people mature, they will naturally seek more independence and test the limits from time to time. During this phase, it's important to establish healthy rules and expectations to ensure your teens safety, development, and overall well-being.

Creating a safe space

When talking about rules with your teen, it is important to create an atmosphere of trust and respect by listening to their thoughts, feelings, and concerns and reassuring them that they can always come to you. By being supportive and open minded in these moments, you can help them feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts. It's all about building a safe space for them to speak openly so, even when rules are broken, they're more likely to discuss things with you because they know that it will be dealt with in a healthy and constructive manner.

Discussing rules and expectations

When you set an expectation or rule, you're simply saying, "this is what I'm okay with, and this is what I'm not okay with". Having open discussions with your teen about rules and limits and including them in the decision gives them a sense of ownership and responsibility. Consider their thoughts and be willing to negotiate, where possible, to reflect their growing maturity and independence. Generally, your teen will be more willing to listen to rules and stick to them when there is a little give and take. By balancing independence with a safety net of support you are helping foster your teens autonomy and build their trust.

Be clear

Establish clear and reasonable expectations with your teenager. Be specific about rules, curfews, chores, or responsibilities. It's important to align the expectations with their age, maturity level, and the values of your family. For example, using language like "clean up your mess" might not get you the results you want because a teen won't know exactly what to clean up or their standard of cleaning may be different to your own. Instead, pointing out which things need to be cleaned up and where you expect them to be put away provides clear instructions for them to follow. It's also important to set clear consequences and to link the consequence with the rule that was broken. For example, if your teen stays out past the curfew that you'd agreed on, rather than a general consequence like taking away their phone, which doesn't directly link to the problem, you could consider restricting them from going to parties until they can show you they can be trusted to be home on time.

Keep it consistent

Consistency is key when setting successful rules and limits. When your teen knows what to expect, they will be more likely to stick to the rules in place. Help them understand the reasons behind the rules you've set and explain the potential consequences of crossing these limits. It's not easy to dish out consequences, but let

your teen know that the rules exist to keep them safe and help them make responsible decisions. When teens grasp the underlying reasons, they are more likely to respect rules and follow them.

Lead by example

When your child sees you creating healthy boundaries for yourself and taking responsibility for your actions, they are more likely to imitate these behaviours themselves. On the flip side however, setting expectations for your teen that contradict your own actions can create a double standard for them and cause them to view certain rules as unfair. It's important that they understand that creating healthy boundaries is crucial for adults too, and by building the right habits now, they will be better equipped in the future.

Creating healthy boundaries with your teen doesn't always come easy but it's important to remain patient and celebrate the small wins. Together, you can navigate this important phase of their life with love and mutual respect.

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