



Partnerships

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A Guide for Parents

The ABCs of Coping With Adolescence

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The teen years are a critical period of development for our children. Teenagers face changes in their biological and emotional makeup and in their social relationships. If teens are to devote their energy and attention to learning in school, these changes require that teens develop an array of coping skills. Talking with teens regularly about what they are learning at school and the struggles they are facing academically, emotionally, and socially is very important to maintaining a healthy line of communication and offers opportunities for providing guidance and support. In addition, there are a number of other strategies that adults can use to help teens develop their ability to cope with change in their lives, and these strategies—which can be incorporated into the everyday activities of the household—are outlined below.

Developing Academic, Social, and Emotional Skills in Teens

What are some of the primary responsibilities of parents with regard to meeting the social and emotional needs of adolescents? Four areas that should be the focus of concern among parents are:

- ◆ **Problem-solving skills:** developing skills for analyzing stressful social situations, identifying feelings and goals, making plans, communicating, relationship building, and conflict resolution
- ◆ **Emerging sexuality:** being aware of sexual development, recognizing and accepting body changes, recognizing and resisting inappropriate sexual behaviors
- ◆ **Healthy, drug- and violence-free lifestyles:** establishing healthy lifestyles and avoiding drugs, alcohol, tobacco, steroids, and other illegal or harmful substances; and rejecting violence as a means of problem solving
- ◆ **Civic responsibility:** building a sense of social and civic responsibility for school, family, and community

The A, B, and 3 Cs of Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth

What teens need for social, emotional, and academic growth and the development of sound character is well known and within the reach of parents to provide. These needs can easily be remembered as A, B, and the 3 Cs: **A**ppreciation, **B**elonging, **C**onfidence, **C**ompetencies, and **C**ontributions.

- ◆ **Appreciation:** Do not underestimate the importance of small gestures of appreciation to adolescents. Parents should give teens clear praise for trying new things and taking care of even small household responsibilities.
- ◆ **Belonging:** Adolescents have a strong interest in belonging to groups in which they are able to be relaxed and do not feel pressured to perform under stressful situations. Parents should help their teens participate in local teams and take classes to build hobbies, but avoid overload.

- ◆ **Confidence:** Teenagers' confidence can be eroded when they feel humiliated, either by real or exaggerated issues related to their appearance or relationships, or because teasing and belittling is a part of the culture of their school or peer group. Parents should encourage effort and follow-through to build teenager's confidence.
- ◆ **Competence:** Doing well on assignments and projects, exercising leadership skills, initiating one's own actions, and working effectively in groups are important signs of social, emotional, and academic growth. To nurture teenagers' competencies, parents should help their teens build study skills and planning skills for projects, assignments, and household and family responsibilities.
- ◆ **Contributions:** While teens appear to be self-centered, that does not mean they are selfish. Teenagers are eager to make contributions to the world that are meaningful and noteworthy, but few have a clear sense of how to take advantage of opportunities for doing this. Parents can involve teens in family charity decisions by encouraging gift-giving to those in greater need, and by modeling and encouraging community service.

Important Topics for Parent–School Partnerships

Ensuring the smooth passage to young adulthood requires parents and schools to work together in partnership. The topics listed below can lead to important discussions and enhance a sense of partnership between parents and educators, educators and students, and children and parents. These topics are keyed to the academic, social, and emotional areas of concern to teens, as well as the A, B, and 3 C's that serve to nourish their spirit and character.

- ◆ Organizing the family to help teens meet academic demands—with less stress for all
- ◆ Choosing friends thoughtfully and also dealing with the influence of group norms, popular trends, media, and the importance of belonging
- ◆ Developing leadership and initiative-taking skills
- ◆ Dealing with conflict among friends and with authority figures
- ◆ Finding alternatives to verbal and nonverbal aggression, especially in times of high stress, frustration, and exhaustion
- ◆ Recognizing likely conflicts between parents' and peers' values (e.g., clothing, importance of achievement, use of electronic media, curfews and bedtimes)
- ◆ Learning about stages in the lives of teens, adults, and parents
- ◆ Dealing with diversity, difference, and various handicapping and challenging conditions

Give Teens the Skills to Soar

In conclusion, key social and emotional skills will help teens develop positive bonds to home and school, a greater sense of personal possibilities, and a positive view of themselves in their social environments. Taken together, these should act as deterrents against unhealthy lifestyles and serious patterns of problem behaviors and at the same time allow the academic tasks of school to have the potential for greater appeal and relevance than is currently the case for many students.

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