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STAYING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR TEENS

Parents whose children are between 13 and 18 are often at their wit's end. The adolescent years are predictably turbulent for both teens and parents. Mom and Dad often wonder what happened to the nice boy who loved to play quietly and to that sweet girl who chattered non-stop about school and friends as she helped get dinner on the table. Suddenly, it seems, it's either silence or belligerence. What's a parent to do?



When dealing with teens, it's important to keep your cool and to work hard at staying in touch with these rapidly changing creatures. Among other things, staying in touch includes having fun together and being a good listener.

Parents also need to learn how to evaluate different kinds of "problem" behavior and—when necessary—develop strategies for dealing with it. The trick is to remain calm while trying to tell the difference between dangerous conduct and normal strides toward independence. When behavior becomes dangerous, especially if it involves the "Big Three"—driving, drug/alcohol use, and sex—parents have to be able to draw the line.

Recent research indicates that open and friendly communication between parents and teenagers lowers the likelihood that the teens will get hurt by risk-taking behavior, though such positive communication does not guarantee that kids will avoid all behavior their parents might not like. Independence is essential if teens are to mature naturally and take their place in the adult world. To first-time parents of adolescents, though, independence sometimes looks like rebellion.

HERE ARE SOME GROUND RULES FOR ONE-ON-ONE TIME

How can parents stay in touch with their teens when it seems the kids are out with friends all the time? Or, when the kids are home, they're in their room, on the phone or on the computer. One-on-one fun—not family fun—is a good start. Your teens may not want to eat dinner with the family, and family outings may not be on their agenda. But dinner and a movie, a shopping excursion, or driving around in the car—just the two of you—may help a lot. Let your spouse stay home with the other kids. Take turns getting to know the person your child is becoming. **Continued on page 2**

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Here are several ground rules for one-on-one time with your teen:

1. No problem discussions about hair, grades, friends, texting etc.
2. Make an appointment well in advance, choosing a time that is mutually convenient. Honor your commitment; no last minute excuses about being tired or needing to stay late at work.
3. Put on your “active-listening shoes.” Let your teen talk without judging, correcting or interrupting.
4. Talk about yourself! Without necessarily trying to teach a lesson, let your youngster know what you went through when you were their age.

One-on-one time can go a long way toward relaxing the day-to-day tensions that are bound to arise. If you don't learn how to talk to your teens about little things, communication about the serious issues will be doubly difficult. A little patience and some willingness to loosen the reins—when appropriate—can pay big dividends for you and your teenager in the future.

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SHOULD YOU EVER SPANK YOUR CHILD?

It's about time people face up to reality: *ninety percent of all spankings are parental temper tantrums.* They are in no way attempts to train or educate a child. They are simply the angry outburst of a parent who has lost control, doesn't know what to do and wants revenge by inflicting pain. Parents who have big problems with self-control and anger management try to justify and rationalize spanking by saying things like, “You have to set limits,” “It's for their own good,” and “Having to hit kids hurts me more than it does them.”

It's true there are cultures and groups where spanking is more often perceived as a legitimate discipline technique. But research tells us that physical discipline like this tends to generate anxiety in children, lower their self-esteem and make the kids more likely to become aggressive themselves. Generally speaking, though, adults who spank do not care one bit about research. I have on occasion talked until I'm blue in the face with parents like these, and sadly enough, changing their opinions and their discipline habits is often a lost cause.

Remember, the whole point of the [1-2-3 Magic](#) program is to avoid the Talk-Persuade-Argue-Yell-Hit routine.

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