

## Thriving During the Teenage Years - Growing As Parents

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For parents of middle and high school students, efforts to help their children achieve in school can often seem like a recipe for disaster. Due to adolescent development, all the ingredients are in place: impulsivity, questioning authority, desire for independence, and raging hormones + school! It's a roller coaster ride for most families.

The most difficult challenge for parents is often making the shift from control to advice. When our children are young we are able to exert a significant amount of control over their behavior. As they move through adolescence, those techniques are less and less effective. This is because the task of adolescence is to individuate, to become an independent adult. This necessitates separating from parental control in order to develop self-control, to learn by experimenting and making mistakes, to develop an internal set of values, morals, and identity. Consequently this is a very challenging phase of development for adolescents and their parents. Shifting from control to advice recognizes your child's developmental task and allows the parent to maintain and strengthen their relationship and influence.

In order to be more effective with your adolescent, consider the following suggestions:

- **Show Respect:** part of the shift to adolescence is the subjective experience of no longer being a child, yet having parents continue to treat you as a child. The reality is that on a physiological and developmental level they are at the very early stages of adulthood. In addition, if you don't show your adolescent respect you will have difficulty getting respect from them.
- **Be a Good Listener:** Even before you give advice, you first want to give your adolescent every opportunity to share their feelings, viewpoints, even if you strongly disagree. There's always time to give advice later.
- **Use Empowerment:** Give your adolescent more say over matters that concern him/her. Provide an opportunity to "try it their way" with the understanding that if it's not successful, other strategies will be necessary. Barring unsafe situations, it's important for them to learn by their mistakes as well as their successes.
- **Connect Privileges with Effort:** Consider linking privileges (e.g. curfew, driving, bed time, etc.) with accomplishing agreed upon tasks (e.g. school performance, chores, etc.)
- **Don't Sweat the Small Stuff:** More than ever you need to choose your battles, otherwise the battles will be endless. In addition, utilizing the strategies above will minimize the number of potential battles that you will have.

A common battleground for parents and adolescents is school. With the shift from control to advice, comes the premise that your adolescent needs to take ownership of their schoolwork. It should be made clear, for example, that if an adolescent wants parental help with school, it is their responsibility to request it. The ideal time to make this shift is during middle school, but it's never too late. Our parenting strategies must grow and mature as our children grow and mature.