

Engage Adolescents by Meeting Their Development Needs

SOME IDEAS INCLUDE:

Encourage and model physical activity.

Exercise will help teens burn excess energy, strengthen developing muscles, and sleep better at night. It may also help teens become more comfortable in their changing bodies.

Be patient with excessive grooming habits.

Teens often spend large amounts of time grooming themselves and obsessing over skin care products. Often, this behavior merely reflects teens' attempts to maintain some sense of control over their rapidly changing bodies.

Don't take it personally when teens discount your experience.

Try to empathize with and listen to their concerns. Enlist the help of a slightly older sibling or friend [or mentor] to give good advice to the teen if needed.

Get teens involved in discussing their behavioral rules and consequences.

Teens should take a more active role in determining how they should behave. Their advanced reasoning skills make it easier for them to generate realistic consequences for their actions. Listen to their ideas!

Provide opportunities for teens to participate in controlled risky behavior.

Get teens involved in properly supervised extreme sports, parachuting, or rock climbing. Such activities will allow teens opportunities to play out their "it can't happen to me" mentality in an environment that won't be deadly if they fail.

Provide opportunities for teens to get involved in community service.

Teens want to become active in things that have deeper meaning. Suggest they volunteer at a homeless shelter, walk dogs for the animal shelter or take meals to the elderly. Talk with them about their experiences.

Talk to teens about their views and be open to discussing your own.

Find out what they think about news stories on television or in the paper; ask them about their political and spiritual beliefs. Teens are already thinking about these things so give them a non-threatening forum for discussing them.

Encourage involvement in multiple groups or activities both within school and after school.

Realize that teens are trying to gain a sense of achievement – a sense of being uniquely good at something. Don't get frustrated if they frequently change their minds. At the same time, encourage them to stick with a project or activity long enough to establish some skills.

Praise teens for their efforts as well as their abilities.

This will help teens to stick with activities instead of giving up if they are not immediately successful.

Help teens explore career goals and options.

Take teens to work so they can see what adults do. Set up opportunities for them to "job shadow" others. Ask them questions about their future career goals. Remember that figuring out what they don't want to do is just as important as figuring out what they like!

Continue to provide a structured environment.

Teens should be allowed to have more independence, but not enough to place them in jeopardy. Despite their complaints, teens rely on adults to provide them with the sense of safety and structure they need to deal effectively with all the psychosocial tasks of adolescents.