

# Working teens and setting priorities

The teenage years are a perfect time to start working and often this starts with a summer job. Work experience can offer many valuable lessons for teens and gives them a sense of accomplishment. They develop skills they will need to become successful in the adult workforce such as how to balance time, manage money, and work with others.

Getting a summer job can improve your teen's self-esteem and self-worth. It can help your teen act responsibly, cooperate, and have the confidence to try new things.



Assist them with a job search. School counsellors, family friends, and other types of community networking can be excellent resources. Make sure that when your teen accepts a job, there will be enough time to fulfill academic, social, and family obligations. Is this a part-time job that can be continued when school begins again? Prepare them for the length of time they could be working and, if possible, help them consider ways to continue working when the summer is over.

Stress the importance of finding a balance. Help your teen set priorities and help them understand the need to schedule enough rest, eat nourishing foods, and getting regular physical activity while balancing their work schedule. This is a life-long skill and can be encouraged by parents.

Help your teen manage money. Have your teen watch and learn how you pay household bills, which demonstrates the need to budget for everyday expenses. Start a bank account with your teen to help them learn how to manage personal finances.

## Remember – your teen still needs you!

Parenting a teenager can be both challenging and rewarding. Many teens have conflicting feelings about growing up and aren't yet able to gracefully manage these emotions. They can be inconsistent with their affections, argumentative, and at times even hurtful. As your teen struggles with becoming independent, it is natural for them to detach from you at times. Remember that your teen still needs

you. Although your teen may not ever let on, your unconditional love and guidance are important and valued. The following suggestions may help you communicate with and support your teenager during a time of uncertainty and change.

- Stay connected. Go to your teen's activities. This tells teens that they are important and opens the door to communication.
- Give your teen responsibilities. Assign jobs around the house, such as caring for younger siblings, cooking one night a week, making lunch, and other responsibilities. Trusting your teen with regular duties helps build self-confidence and promotes a sense of accomplishment. A part-time summer job can help with this, too!
- Set clear rules. Remove emotion from discipline and focus on natural consequences. If you are firm, fair, and consistent about your rules, your teen will know what to expect. Also, doing this helps you to respond to problems appropriately. For example, if both you and your teen know the consequence of missing curfew, it will prevent you from reacting leniently some of the time and overreacting other times.
- Accept that your way isn't the only way. Recognize that your teen will likely approach tasks or situations differently than you. For example, your teen may do homework with a headset on while lying on the floor of an extremely messy room. You may view this as an undisciplined and chaotic environment that makes it impossible to concentrate. But focus on the outcomes. If your teen is doing well, accept that these methods work.
- Be flexible. Teens want and need boundaries with limits that fit their age and development. As your teen matures, change rules as appropriate to reward responsible behaviour. Also, realize that being fair sometimes means agreeing to bend the rules. Teens are less likely to resent a parent who discusses situations rationally and in an adult manner. Sometimes finding a compromise with your teenager is the most effective solution.
- Believe in your teen. Recognize that we all go through difficult phases. Although some teens struggle, most teens manage common challenges without major problems. Many teens develop a sense that they are not living up to an idealized view of how they should be. Accept that your teen is not perfect and will inevitably make some mistakes. Let your teen know your love is unconditional.
- Help your teen set goals. Teens learn how to think strategically when parents encourage them to set goals and help them develop a plan to reach them.
- Listen. It sounds so simple, but it is one communication skill that parents often have the most trouble with. Be sensitive to and alert for cues that your teen needs to talk. Don't be



quick to offer advice—give it only if requested. Sometimes teens just need someone to listen to them. They often can find the right answers by themselves.

- Set an example. Strive to model your own beliefs and values in your behaviours so that your child can emulate not only what you say but also what you do. To encourage community involvement, for example, you could volunteer together with your child. As your teen nears adulthood, they will pay more and more attention to your actions.

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