

# Getting Along with Your Teenager

When parents and teens get along, life is simpler and more pleasant for everyone. Here are common problems—and solutions for you to try.



## Speaking respectfully

**Scenario:** Your child rolls his eyes and sighs loudly while you're talking. Or he puts down siblings and makes mean remarks.

**Ideas:** How you respond can make the difference in whether a situation escalates. If your child is rude to you, speak in a calm voice, but let him know that his behavior is not acceptable. Then, point out more respectful ways to communicate. ("Mom, I disagree with you," rather than "I can't believe you're so mean!") Tell him he can try again and be courteous or you will take a break and finish talking later.

If siblings are rude or speak unkindly to each other, explain that disrespectful language and insults are not okay. Here's an easy test: If your teen wouldn't want his sibling to speak a certain way to him, he shouldn't speak that way to his sibling. Help your children see that using manners with each other (saying "please" and "thank you") and speaking in a nice tone of voice will make your house more peaceful.

## Being responsible

**Scenario:** Your teen puts off schoolwork and leaves chores undone while she's busy texting friends or using apps on her phone. You're aggravated that she's not more responsible, and she says you're always on her case.

**Ideas:** Tell your child that her main responsibility is doing her best in school, and that means homework comes first. And since all family members are expected to help take care of the home, chores must also be completed.



Then, make sure she realizes that things like her cell phone and internet access are privileges, not rights, and you will take them away if she doesn't do her part.

You can also encourage responsibility by not jumping in to rescue her if she doesn't follow through on something (forgets to take a project to school, for example). Suffering the consequences (getting a lower grade) will help her learn a lesson so she's more likely to be responsible next time.

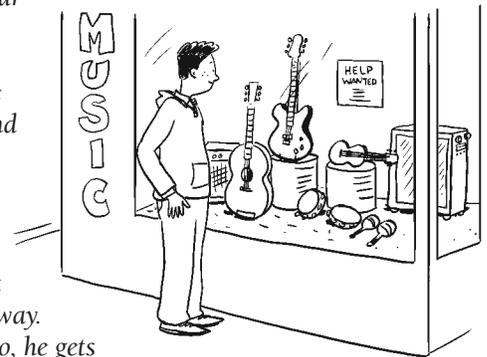
## Wanting more

**Scenario:** Your high schooler wants what his friends have: the latest gadgets and designer clothes. You don't think he needs all these things, and you couldn't afford them anyway.

When you say no, he gets upset and says you never buy him anything.

**Ideas:** Point out what you provide for your child (housing, food, clothing, electricity). Explain that much of your money goes for these basic needs, and the rest has to be divided among savings, activities, entertainment, and other things.

Tell him that he's not entitled to extras just because he wants them. Life is about give and take, and if he wants something, he should figure out ways to get it. He might find a part-time job or save his allowance if he gets one.



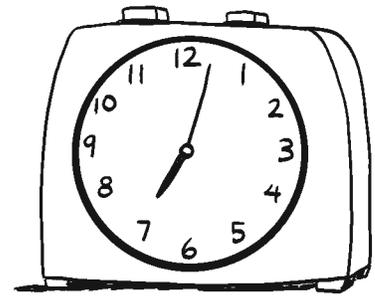
continued

## Avoiding the rush

**Scenario:** It's 7 a.m., and your teen is not ready for school yet. You yell that she should have gotten up earlier. Frustration mounts as you wait, since you have to drop her off at school on your way to work.

**Ideas:** Make hectic mornings calmer by helping your high schooler establish better routines. Have her go to bed earlier so she can get up earlier. Then, encourage her to do things the night before that will make mornings easier. For example, she should think about things she'll need (sports equipment, science project) and put them by the front door.

Another way to minimize morning stress is to work backward. Together, identify what time she needs to arrive somewhere (6:45 p.m. for play practice), subtract the time it takes to get there (15 minutes), and deduct time for getting out the door, parking, and walking inside (10 minutes). Whether she's catching a ride or driving herself, that's when she should be ready to go (6:20 p.m.).



## Blending right in



Many teenagers live in stepfamilies or split their time between two homes. No matter what the living arrangements are in your family, peace can prevail. Try these ideas.

### Stepfamilies:

- Let parents (rather than stepparents) take the lead on rules, especially at first. Your teenager will be more accepting of a stepparent who doesn't act like a disciplinarian. Stepparents can enforce rules by simply stating the rule the parent has set ("Your mom says you can't have friends in the car when you drive"). If the teen doesn't obey, the parent can apply the consequences.
- Ask your child for input when starting new family traditions for birthdays and holidays. Rather than doing away with old ways of celebrating, invite her to help create a plan that includes everyone's ideas. She'll feel less resentful about changes if she is part of making them.
- Provide ways for your high schooler to express her feelings about the new family arrangement. You might give her a journal or have her talk to a counselor. Bottling up her feelings will make her more likely to be resentful or to act out.

### Shared parenting:

- Stick with consistent routines for things like meals and homework. You and your ex probably won't agree on every rule, but you should keep bigger ones the same (no smoking, no skipping classes). This provides your high schooler with stability.
- Make arrangements ahead of time for your child's activities. He can line up reliable transportation, and both sets of parents should know about performances and events. Communicating early and often will help avoid mix-ups.
- Talk positively about the other parent in front of your teen. He'll see that you view each other as people who love and support him rather than as competitors. Your high schooler will feel more secure if he sees that everyone is working together.



## High School Years