



Your Involvement Counts

Although teens may act like they don't want you to be involved in their school or life, and in fact may tell you to "mind your own business," the truth is most teens crave their parent's attention but either don't realize it don't want to admit it.

MYTH: Parents of high schoolers need to be less involved so their teen can learn independence.

TRUTH: Parents need to stay involved, but in different ways, according to research. Rather than help students with homework or reading to their child, for instance, parents of teens should focus on setting consistent rules and holding high expectations of their students (with curfews, bedtimes, school grades, and school attendance, for example) and helping their teen with life skills such as planning, decision-making, finances and insurance, and civic responsibility such as voting.

MYTH: Parent involvement is for little kids; teens don't want that.

TRUTH: Kids of all ages – including teens – desperately want to impress their parents. However, teens are more likely to deny it because of peer pressure or because they fear disappointing their parents (it's easier to reject your parents than be rejected by them). While it is true that peer influence is very high among teens, getting a compliment from a parent is still No. 1.

MYTH: Parent involvement doesn't matter as much when kids get to high school.

TRUTH: Research shows that students have better attendance, behavior, and grades when their parents show an interest in their courses and plans for the future. When parents have high expectations for their kids and communicate them clearly to their kids, the kids are more likely to have high expectations for themselves. Also, students try harder in school (although they may complain about it) when they know their parents are paying attention.

So what can parents do to stay involved, aside from attending high school events or parent-teacher conferences?

- Communicate regularly with your child's teachers to ask about classroom behavior and achievement.
- Have a conversation with your teen every day.
- Set and clearly communicate rules and expectations.
- Ask her about plans for the future. Help him use the career planning tools at his high school, and to understand the various paths he can take after high school, and how he should choose the best path for him.
- Show your teen you want to help her independence by helping her set up a bank account, purchase her own insurance, and register to vote.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEEN

- Use car time to have a conversation. Teens feel comfortable talking in the car – perhaps because it is often dark, and they don't have to look at you, so it's less daunting.
- Kids desperately want to impress their parents, so let them. Ask questions about something the teen is interested in, and let them educate you.
- Tell her something about your day – you feel great because you met a deadline, or had an awful meeting with your boss – and ask her what great or miserable thing happened to her that day.
- Listen and agree (yes, tests can be awful) rather than judge or fix their problem (you should have studied more).
- When the teen is around, model good conversation and interest in other family members. You'll pique their interest because they like to be part of the action.
- Tell your teen you heard a good report from one of his teachers (or a boss or a neighbor).
- Start short and simple, but be flexible. Don't expect long conversations with teens, especially if you're just getting started. But be ready if they're in the mood to talk.
- Keep trying. You won't succeed at drawing out your teen the first time, or every time. They are testing you to see if you'll give up on them. Don't.