



# Employee Assistance Program

## Connecting With Your Teen

The teen years can be a trying time for everyone. However, with a little bit of insight and a lot of patience, this important yet sometimes stormy sea can be navigated successfully.

### What You Can Do

- **Encourage and reward good decisions and establish negative consequences for poor decisions.** More importantly, help them use their poor decisions as a learning experience.
- **Encourage your teen to develop negotiating skills.** Whining, explosive anger, excessive argumentation, and playing those in authority off each other are not appropriate strategies for getting one's way. Compromise, problem-solving, and discovering common ground are examples of good negotiating skills. Labeling any of these behaviors when you observe them is a good way to promote self-understanding on the part of your teen.
- **Choose your battles wisely.** Be flexible when appropriate. Be firm if necessary. However, if you believe that your teenager is engaged in seriously harmful activity, do not yield to pressure to change your mind about limiting or ending that activity. Of course, knowing what is seriously harmful can be tricky. Different people will have different opinions. When in doubt, seek input from your spouse, friends, or a professional counselor.
- **Help your teen become a problem solver.** Rather than doing everything for them, and attempting to solve all their problems, help them figure out solutions and follow through with them to see how it went.
- **Take time to connect.** Try to get into a habit of carving out time during the day or week where you can talk and connect, even if it's simply over dinner or breakfast. Better yet, participate regularly in an activity that you both enjoy – make it your time together.
- **Use choices, not threats.** Instead of saying "Clean up your room or you are grounded," try, "If you want to go to the movie this evening, you've got to clean up your room before dinner. Otherwise you'll have to stay home and get it done." Most importantly, make sure you follow through.
- **Explain yourself.** While there are times when the best reason really is "because I said so," as a rule, it is better to explain your thinking when you tell your teen to do something. Teens who understand your reasoning, even if they do not agree with you, are more likely to cooperate willingly. Plus, your explanation teaches them to be reasonable and explain themselves.
- **Understand them developmentally.** It helps you to keep your cool and respond constructively if you know what is "normal" at a given age and stage.
- **Take good care of yourself.** If you are stressed out, angry, depressed or detached, it is hard to be patient. So it is important to learn how to nurture yourself. If you are being overly cranky, give yourself ten minutes or so to relax and calm down. Everyone will benefit.

For more information about parenting or family concerns, visit the website or call the toll free number listed below.



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