

## Common Stresses for Parents of Teens

- Teen less involved with family
- Struggles over family rules
- Increased arguments
- Parents' own challenges
- Money struggles
- Nutritional concerns
- Not enough time
- Worry over serious problems

For Further Reading  
Other publications available at your county extension office include:  
Pm 1547a, *Using Consequences*  
Pm 1547h, *Keeping Young People Out of Trouble*  
Pm 1660g, *Managing Conflict with Teens*

File: Family life 3

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... and justice for all

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*Janet and Greg are finding life with a teenager difficult. They used to do more with their son, Jeff, 15, but now he is busy with his own friends, activities, and doesn't seem to want to talk to his parents. He often argues with them about rules and always seems to need money for something. They are dreading the time when Jeff's younger brother and sister also will be teens.*

The teen years bring new stresses for many families. The parent-child relationship is changing and teens want to express and act on their own ideas. Parents may miss some of the fun they had with their teen when he/she was younger. At the same time parents are growing and changing too, and have challenges of their own with jobs, homes, their parents and extended family, and very busy schedules.

It helps to understand the normal changes during adolescence and to know when your teen might be headed for serious problems. Your teen needs to know without a doubt that you still love him or her. At the same time, your teen needs firm limits and consequences when rules are broken.

## Stress for Families with Teens

### The Changing Parent-Child Relationship

*Lisa's parents are disappointed that she doesn't seem to want to spend time with them anymore. She is so busy with her own friends that she no longer has time to go shopping with Mom or shoot baskets with Dad. Her parents feel like they are not very important to her anymore.*

The fact is that parents and family make all the difference in the lives of teens. Loving and firm involvement of parents helps protect youngsters from serious problems and helps young people become gradually more and more able to make good decisions and develop responsibility. Parents need to show love, to allow teens to become more independent, yet still find ways to spend time together.

- Understand that it's normal for teens to spend less time with family.
- Make specific times for family (e.g., Sunday night popcorn and board game or an evening out for pizza).
- Ask your teen to help plan family events (like attending a sports event or holiday celebration).
- Spend one-on-one time. Go for a walk, bike ride, or out for ice cream.
- Use trips in the car as a time to talk.
- Try to see things from your teen's point of view.
- Avoid using time together for criticizing or lecturing.

### Disagreements over Rules

*Thirteen-year-old Josh wants to argue over everything his parents expect. He says chores are "no fair" and doesn't want to do homework after supper. He seems to question everything.*

Even though it's normal for teens to want to think for themselves, it's easy to become upset when your preteen or teen challenges you on rules and argues with you over everything. It is a rare teen who continues to clean his or her room, do homework on time, and help with chores without either arguing or ignoring what you have asked. It helps to stay calm, even when your teen is being unreasonable.

- Work with your teen to make a short list of rules.
- Concentrate on the rules that are the most important.
- Follow through to see that your teen does what he/she has agreed to.
- Never argue with your teen. Instead, say, "Nevertheless you agreed to ..."
- Talk with your teen about problems when you are both calm.
- Compliment and give privileges when rules are followed.
- Give small consequences when a small rule is broken (e.g., a 5-minute chore for watching TV instead of doing homework on time).
- Save big consequences for big problems (like coming home very late or skipping school classes).

### "But I have my own problems."

As a parent, you may be wondering when and how you will have the time and energy to deal effectively with your teenager. As a parent, you probably have your own worries - stress at your job or from being unemployed; time pressures from work, family, and community

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activities; marriage problems; or concerns with your own parents or other family members. How can you balance all of it?

- Take time for yourself, even if it's just 10 minutes a day.
- Spend time each week on a hobby.
- Exercise with a spouse, a friend, or your teen.
- Talk to other parents of teens. Find out what works for them.
- Say "no" to outside demands.
- Remember your spiritual life. Read, talk to friends with similar beliefs, attend religious services.

### **Manage Your Time and Money**

Managing time and money with teenagers in the family can be a frustrating experience. The older the teens, the more likely they are to have activities that compete with family time, and the more expensive their wants and needs. Just when parents are thinking ahead to college expenses, the teenager develops what seems to be outrageously expensive tastes. (Designer jeans come to mind!)

Here are some ways to manage time and money when you have teenagers.

- As a family, set priorities for family, school, and work, and use those priorities to make decisions about the use of time and money.
- Have a master calendar on which important family, school, and community events are noted.
- Insist that teens take responsibility for time and money management. If a 14-year-old wants you at the soccer game, he/she should be the one to get the date and time on the master calendar.
- Be wary of permitting teenagers to work long hours. A part-time job may teach responsibility and provide income as long as work does not interfere with the teenager's main responsibility, completing high school successfully.
- Let the teenager assume responsibility for his or her own laundry.
- Manage money with an eye to the future as well as the present. Even though money is tight, have a savings and investment plan.

### **Eat Well, Be Well**

Eating well is a positive act that can help you feel up to the demands of life. Although no specific food can erase stress, sensible eating can help you feel at your best.

Your family members may be so busy living on different schedules that you are rarely able to sit down to eat together. Be reassured that healthful eating is possible, even in a hectic life. Three square meals a day have given way to meals and snacks on the run. Here are some tips to help you eat well and be well.

- Put fresh fruits where you can see them—on the counter or table. It's easy to grab a few pieces on your way out the door.
- Keep a bag of vegetables in the freezer, ready to thaw and eat.
- Keep fruit canned in juice handy in your kitchen cupboard.
- Order orange juice, baked potatoes, and salads at fast food restaurants.
- Use vegetables and fruits that need little peeling or chopping - baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, and grapes.
- Keep jars of spaghetti sauce on hand. Cook up a pot of pasta for a super-easy meal.
- Bake a potato in the microwave and top with pizza sauce and grated cheese for another easy meal.
- Keep bottles of water (new or refilled) in the refrigerator to have a cold beverage on hand.
- Use the daily Food Guide Pyramid recommendations to make a shopping list of snack and meal ingredients:
  - 6 servings of grain products (bread, rice, pasta, muffins, crackers)
  - 3 servings of vegetables
  - 2 servings of fruits
  - 2-3 servings of dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese)
  - 2-3 servings of meat or meat substitutes (meat, chicken, eggs, beans, turkey, fish)

Decide what foods you would like your family to eat, then maintain a supply in the house of those foods in ready-to-eat or very-easy-to-fix form. Keep competing foods (such as pop, chips, candy) out of the house.

### **Teens in Serious Trouble**

In addition to stress from the everyday challenges of raising teenagers, more stress can occur if teens experience serious problems like teen pregnancy, drug or alcohol abuse, gangs, and delinquency. Fortunately, most teens make it through adolescence without major trouble, but parents need to know what to look for and how to handle the really tough problems. For more information on this topic, read extension publications, *Keeping Young People Out of Trouble*, Pm 1547h; and *Managing Conflict with Teens*, Pm 1660g.

The teen years can be good ones for both parents and youth when parents know what to expect, keep connected with their teenagers, and have firm expectations for their behavior. Reading about ways of handling situations, talking to other parents or family counselors can help. Teens need to know every day that parents care about them. Saying, "I love you," giving hugs, and spending special one-on-one time can make all the difference. Teens who really believe that they are loved are more apt to act responsibly and develop into caring adults.

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### **Tips for Parents**

Remember, parents matter. Provide guidance and support. Look for positive behavior and provide rewards.

- Stay warm and close. Spend time together and find ways to say "I love you"
- Stay involved. Ask teens questions about their activities and items of interest to them.
- Set limits, provide structure, enforce rules and consequences. Involve teens in deciding specific rules and consequences. Clearly communicate expectations, follow through on punishments.
- Be consistent each day and in every situation.
- Don't use harsh discipline or discipline your teen when you are angry.
- Treat your teen with respect. Acknowledge his/her growing independence and ability to make decisions.
- Remember, your relationship with your teen is changing, not ending.

**TEENS** Taking Charge