

The 6 Most Important Decisions Your Teen Will Ever Make

While your teen's grandparents may have had to walk to school uphill in the snow (both ways), the obstacles today's young adults are presented with are no picnic either, and they reflect the tumultuous nature of our time. Intense media saturation, online predators and harassment, fear of terrorism, drugs, depression, and peer pressure are just a few of the hurdles teens regularly face. Life is about choices, and the decisions your teen makes today can affect her life in years to come, long after high school is over. Here are six key decisions you should discuss with your child:



- **School:** How does your teen plan to spend his years in school? Does he take his studies seriously? Talk openly with your teen about his educational experience. Brainstorm together on ways he can make the most of his high school years.
- **Friends:** How does your child choose her friends? Does she surround herself with people that lift her up and make her feel supported? Does she worry that she is "supposed to be" friends with a certain crowd of people? How does she feel about popularity? Make sure to have an open dialogue with your teen about all the different aspects of choosing friends, and the complications that can arise with maintaining those relationships.
- **Parents:** How is your relationship with your teen? Make sure he knows you are always going to be there for him, but that he needs to respect you and the boundaries you set. As he begins to crave more freedom and fewer restrictions from you, it will be important that he understands that those freedoms come with additional responsibilities. Keeping the lines of communication open is essential.
- **Dating & Sex:** How does your teen feel about dating, and what does she know about sex? This can be the most difficult of the 6 decisions for you to discuss with your teen, but it is arguably one of the most important. Let your teen talk openly about her feelings, desires, and fears, but make sure she is crystal clear on the serious risks, both physical and emotional, that come with any serious romantic relationship. Brainstorm together on ways she can keep dating "safe." Talk openly about group dates, curfews, and other ideas for keeping her love life in a place that is comfortable for both of you.
- **Addictions:** Does your teen recognize the serious dangers that accompany alcohol and drug use or does his attitude seem a little flippant? Listen to what your teen has to say about drugs and alcohol, and encourage him to be truthful about any experimentation he, or even his friends, have engaged in. Curiosity is normal in teens, but nothing is more vital than ensuring your child makes it out of his teen years with his mind and body intact and under his own control.
- **Self-Worth:** Of all the 6 decisions, this can be the one that truly determines how your child will face the other 5. If your teen learns to see herself in the best light possible, learns to love herself - flaws and all - the temptations of drugs, drinking, blowing off school, and sex before she is ready won't seem so tempting. Ask your teen how much she feels she is worth. Help her examine her life and figure out ways she can avoid compromising her character.

Sure, talking to your teen can be difficult. But caring for your teen through a drug or alcohol addiction, an unwanted pregnancy, or even failing grades can be a lot worse. The more you share, and the more you truly listen to your teen, the easier it will be to communicate in the future. Use the above 6 decisions as a guideline, and let your teen know you are really interested in what she has to say. You'll be amazed where the conversation takes you.