



# Tips for Parents of Teenagers

## Parenting

The natural changes your teen goes through can be hard for both of you. Your love and guidance can help them make good choices.

Here are some helpful approaches to parenting during the teen years:

- Understand it's normal for teens to want more independence. They may be less willing to be involved and may start to challenge your authority.
- Respect your teen's need for privacy, while setting realistic rules that protect their health and safety.
- Give more responsibility as your teen seems ready. Set clear limits and consequences.
- Listen without distractions. When your teen wants to talk, make time to stop what you're doing.
- Find opportunities for fun, one-on-one time with your teen.

School is a big part of your teen's life. To help support them, you can:

- Show interest in their school life, both academically and socially. If problems arise, work together with your teen and teachers to find solutions.
- Help your teen learn to manage time and stress, and help create a schedule that allows for at least 9 hours of sleep on most nights.

## Many teens today feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Some experience anxiety or depression. Your teen's emotional health is important, and support is available.

To learn more, visit [kpdoc.org/teenmentalhealth](https://kpdoc.org/teenmentalhealth). You can also call the Mental Health Department directly at your local medical center, without a referral. Ask about group support, counseling, and other options.

## Safety

Help teens stay safe by giving clear and consistent messages, setting a good example, and enforcing basic safety rules.

Make sure your teen wears protective pads and a properly fitting helmet when riding a bike or scooter, when skateboarding or rollerblading, and for any contact sports.

If they drive, they must agree to:

- Always wear their seat belt.
- Never use their phone to talk or text while driving.
- Never drink or get high and drive, or ride with anyone who is.

Talk to your teen about smoking and vaping. Vaping can be just as addictive as smoking, and most teens who use it wish they'd never started. Also talk about the risks of alcohol and drugs, including medications not prescribed by a doctor. Learn more at [kpdoc.org/parentteendrugs](https://kpdoc.org/parentteendrugs).

If you keep a gun at home, hiding firearms is not enough. Most children and teens know where they're kept. Prevent unwanted use and injuries by:

- Keeping your firearm unloaded and locked in a lockbox, case, or safe.
- Keeping ammunition in a separate locked container.

## Healthy eating and exercise

You can help your child feel their best by serving nutritious meals and supporting regular physical activity. We recommend you:

- Encourage 60 minutes of physical activity each day.
- Make family mealtimes free of screens and distractions.
- Serve fruits and vegetables your teen likes. A healthy plate is half fruits and vegetables, a quarter protein, and a quarter whole grains.
- Limit soda, sports drinks, juice, and sweetened drinks.

- Limit recreational screen time. Keep TVs and devices out of the bedroom if possible. Create family agreements about where and when it's okay to use screens. We encourage you to make a family plan. Visit **AAP Media Plan** ([healthychildren.org](https://healthychildren.org)).
- Help your teen get enough calcium. Offer nonfat or low-fat dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese). Aim for 4 cups each day. Calcium supplements are another option.
- Ensure your teen gets enough vitamin D. Most teens should take daily supplements of 1,000 to 2,000 IU of vitamin D3.

For more tips, watch our Family Nutrition program at [kpdoc.org/familynutritionemmi](https://kpdoc.org/familynutritionemmi).

## Talking about sexuality

It may not be comfortable at first, but it's important to talk with your teen about sex and relationships. Providing real information and sharing your values openly can make a big impact.

- Initiate the discussion, and start sooner than later. This makes talking less awkward each time. Your teen may be interested but too embarrassed to ask.
- Let them know you're always there to talk, and they won't get in trouble for coming to you with a question or concern.
- Listen carefully and try not to judge. Ask questions and try to understand your teen's perspective.

- Keep talking regularly. Teens who have accurate information—and know they can go to a parent to talk—may be less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

Before your teen becomes sexually active, it's also a good idea to let them know about:

- The risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Discuss abstinence, condom use, and birth control.
- Emergency contraception (EC), which may be an option after having unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy.

It's also important to ensure they've had the HPV vaccine, which can prevent certain cancers that are caused by the HPV virus.

## Well-checks and immunizations

Help your teen schedule a well-check visit every 1 to 2 years. We'll remind you when they're due for checkups and immunizations (shots).

### Vaccines needed and when

**Flu:** Yearly

**COVID-19:** When due

**Tdap:** All students entering 7th grade

**HPV:** 2 doses for all preteens; if missed, ask about getting it now

**Meningococcal:** 1 dose at ages 11 to 12; booster at ages 16 to 18

## Confidential care and privacy

Once your child turns 12, we'll see them privately during at least part of their appointment. California law allows a child age 12 or older to see a clinician without a parent's permission for these confidential concerns:

- Pregnancy and birth control
- STI prevention or treatment
- Alcohol or drug use
- Personal, school, or family issues

### Stay connected to your teen's doctors

We still want to talk with you about your questions and concerns, since you know your teen best. Let us know if you have any specific concerns you'd like to discuss during your child's office visit.

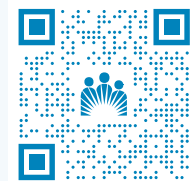
Also, if you haven't already, register on [kp.org](https://kp.org) and set up access to "Act for a Family Member" at [kpdoc.org/familyhealth](https://kpdoc.org/familyhealth). You'll be able to email your teen's doctor, schedule appointments, refill prescriptions, and view and print immunization records. Together, we're here to keep your teen healthy.

### We're here to help



For more teen health resources, visit:

[kp.org/mydoctor](https://kp.org/mydoctor)



This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

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