

# Parents still have influence as kids become teenagers

**I've heard that by the time a child is a teen-ager, friends have more influence on their behavior and development than parents. Is that true?**

Not quite. Research indicates that during adolescence, the influence of friends and peers do take on greater importance than in earlier years. But parents do continue to shape teens' behaviors and choices as they face the challenges inherent in the years between childhood and adulthood.

A report released in June 2006 by Child Trends, a nonprofit research center, and the National Adolescent Health Information Center, revealed that parents do indeed have significant influence on their teens' lives. Unfortunately, that influence can be good or bad.

The research brief, "The Family Environment and Adolescent Well-Being: Exposure to Positive and Negative Family Influences," is accessible online from <http://www.childtrends.org/>. It reveals that over three out of four families with adolescents (age 12 to 17) report having good relationships between child and parent. And that's a good thing: Teens with a positive relationship with their parents are less likely to smoke, fight or drink alcohol. They are also less likely to experience depression and are more likely to express high levels of well-being.

However, one-third to one-half of 15-year-olds revealed that they have difficulty talking with their parents, particularly their fathers,



about things that really bother them. Improving communication at this critical stage could pave the way for stronger relationships.

Families with supportive parents who know their children's whereabouts after school and who know their children's friends and activities have been linked with teens' higher levels of self-esteem, higher grades in school, and greater academic success, as well as lower levels of withdrawal, depression, fighting, drinking, smoking and engaging in other risky behaviors. Fortunately, most parents have a good handle on these aspects of their children's lives.

Eating meals together also has positive effects, allowing time for adolescents and parents to communicate and spend time together. Family meals are associated with less substance use, delinquency and depression, as well as better grades and more nutritious eating habits. Just four out of 10 adolescents ate with their family six to seven days a week.

Finally, parents who engaged in healthful behaviors, such as not smoking or abusing alcohol and who regularly exercise, are more likely to have adolescents who adopt the same healthful activities.

It's clear that parents continue to act as role models and mentors even as children grow into their teenage years. Don't shortchange your influence. Your kids will thank you — someday.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



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**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Cindy Torppa, Ohio State University Extension specialist in family and consumer sciences at the OSU Extension Center at Lima.

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