

# BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES IN ADOLESCENTS



## Adolescents are in a stage of development where they want to be more independent.

As a parent, you may feel surprised when your adolescent starts to argue with you or break the rules sometimes.

Changes in your adolescent's behavior are often a normal part of growing up. If the behaviors seem extreme, professionals may help your child.

## Why do adolescents have challenges with behavior?

**They are not always able to make mature decisions.** Teens begin to spend more time with their friends and less time with the adults that care for them. As a result, they make more decisions on their own without adult input. Since their brains are still developing, this can lead to risky decisions and behavior.

**They have stress.** Stress becomes a daily challenge for many adolescents. They face social pressure (pressure from peers such as friends and classmates). They also face pressure to succeed in school, sports, or other activities. Major life events like a serious illness, parents' divorce, or moving to a new city, can also create stress. Stress can cause changes in behavior, including:

- Angry outbursts (getting angry suddenly)
- Crying episodes
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Physical aggression
- Missing school
- Stopping activities they used to enjoy



## TIPS FOR PARENTS

### How can I support healthy behavior?

**Form a positive relationship.** Listen and let your child speak without interrupting them. Show interest in what is happening in their life. Spend time with them, both one-on-one and together as a family. Be curious about their feelings and perspective.

**Be available when they come to you.** Sometimes, an adolescent is ready to talk when you are not expecting it, like in the car or at bedtime. Be present and available, and they will continue to come to you.

**Ask them how they feel.** If you notice your child seems more stressed, anxious, or irritable, ask them about it. Let them know you are there to listen and help.

**Avoid nagging, shouting at, or embarrassing your teen.** Try to stay calm to avoid reacting out of anger or frustration.

**Set and enforce boundaries.** Make it clear which behaviors are not acceptable. Enforce consequences when your teen breaks the rules.

**Praise positive behaviors.** Sometimes, parents pay more attention to poor behavior. Compliment your adolescent when you see the good behaviors.

**Give them responsibilities.** Let your teenager take on responsibilities, such as doing their laundry or feeding and walking the dog. If they are able to do these things well, reward them with added privileges.

### How can I help my adolescent with their behavioral issues?

As a parent, you can help guide your adolescent's behavior by:

- Setting clear limits (rules and guidelines such as curfew times, screen time limits, and acceptable behavior)
- Setting and respecting boundaries (personal limits that individuals set for themselves about what they want and will allow from others)
- Giving them responsibilities such as caring for a pet or helping prepare a family meal

If your adolescent is showing good behavior, let them have more freedom (such as driving, spending time with friends, or watching television). This helps promote more good behavior.

If you notice more serious behavioral problems that do not improve, speak to your child's doctor. A doctor can check your adolescent for conditions like anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders. They can refer you to a specialist if needed.

**If your teen talks about hurting themselves or others, get help right away.**





## TIPS FOR ADOLESCENTS

### How can I control my behavior?

- **Exercise.** Regular physical activity is good for your body and mind. It can also improve your mood, making you feel happier or calm.
- **Get enough sleep.** Not getting enough sleep can affect your mood and the decisions you make. Try to sleep for at least eight hours each night.
- **Avoid caffeine.** While coffee or energy drinks may sound good, caffeine can make you feel nervous, anxious, or irritable.
- **Do not drink alcohol or use drugs.** They hurt your ability to make good decisions. You are more likely to choose risky behaviors that can cause harm to you or others. This can affect your future.
- **Talk to someone.** If you feel like you cannot control your emotions or behavior, talk to a parent, teacher, or counselor. They are there to help.

### Where can I find online resources for more support?



#### [Stress Management and Teens – English](#)

*American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*



#### [How to Communicate With and Listen to Your Teen – English](#)

*American Academy of Pediatrics*



#### [How to Communicate With and Listen to Your Teen – Spanish](#)

*American Academy of Pediatrics*