



## **How to handle difficult behaviour in older children**

Many parents find their teenager's behaviour challenging. Teenagers' behaviour can be baffling, stressful, hurtful and often worrying. But in most cases it does not mean there is anything more serious going on than the natural process of becoming an adult.

Many of the common behaviour issues that parents find hard are an essential part of puberty and growing up. Surges of hormones, combined with body changes, struggling to find an identity, pressures from friends and a developing sense of independence, mean the teenage years are a confusing time for your child. It can mean they, for example, become aloof, want more time alone or with friends, feel misunderstood, reject your attempts to talk or show affection, or appear sullen and moody.

## **Your feelings about your teen's behaviour**

Teenagers can challenge even the calmest of parents. When you have further pressures in your life, such as other children, work, relationships, family commitments or illness, it can feel as though your teenager is going to push you over the edge.

Try to step back from the situation, and remember they have physiological reasons for behaving in ways that can be difficult to live with. They're probably not enjoying it either. You're the adult, and it is your responsibility to guide them through the difficult times. Do not expect to enjoy your time with them all of the time, and remember to look after yourself.

**How do I cope with the stress?** Parenting a teenager can be exhausting, so it's important to look after yourself, too. Family Lives, a charity dedicated to helping families, offers the following advice:

- make sure you set aside time for yourself
- give yourself permission to relax or even treat yourself occasionally
- talk about your concerns to your partner or friends, or join a support group or forum
- learn techniques for coping with low mood sadness and depression or anxiety. If you're concerned that you're depressed, anxious or stressed, talk to a GP

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**How should I act with my teenager?** Teenagers can be largely emotional rather than logical because of their hormones. It is not necessarily pleasant for them, and it can even feel frightening. Although it might be hard for you, they need you to maintain a calm consistent presence.

Follow these tips:

- decide what the boundaries are and stick to them – teenagers may object to these but know they are a sign that you care for and about them
- listen to them when they do want to talk and try not to interrupt until they've finished speaking
- allow them to learn from their own mistakes – as long as they are safe – and accept they might do things differently to you
- do not bottle up your concerns – if you're worried your teenager may be having unprotected sex or using drugs, try talking calmly and direct them to useful information, such as these articles on drugs or getting contraception.
- allow them to have their own space and privacy

**Where can I find more information and support?** There are several organisations that provide emotional support and practical advice. Try:

- Family Lives is a charity specialising in supporting families. You can call their confidential helpline on 0808 800 2222 (9am to 9pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm Saturday to Sunday). You can also visit their forums
- Relate offers relationship advice and counselling. You can also use Live Chat to talk to a counsellor
- Young Minds, the mental health charity, has a confidential parents' helpline. Call them on 0808 802 5544 (9.30am to 4pm Monday to Friday)

**Information obtained from:** <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/coping-with-your-teenager>

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