

# parenting matters

## Back to Basics: Raising a Healthy Teen



By Laurie Henry, LICSW

The teen years are characterized as a time of physical, emotional and social development. As teens navigate these changes, it is essential for parents to have a strong awareness of what is typical behavior, as well as their role as parents and those essential lessons to teach their teens. Teens are experiencing growth spurts, changes in physical appearance and hormone changes, they are developing their sense of self, questioning their likes and dislikes, and seeking independence. They are looking to belong, establish a peer group, and make their own choices about clothes, friends, and social activities.

During this time, there are basic needs that need to be met. Regardless of what pressures a family or teen is facing, be it economic pressure, academic pressure or social pressure, these basic needs are non negotiable. The most important need that teens have is the need for stability and predictability. This comes in the form of consistent and concrete expectations and limits. As parents, it is essential for teens to know what is expected of them. It is also important for teens to experience a parent that is accepting, and actively listens. Teens have a need for privacy and secrecy, as parents it is important to provide them space while still maintaining an involvement in their life. Teens also need adequate nutrition and sleep to keep them at their optimum health. Finally, it is essential for teens to have a well rounded



lifestyle. In addition to maintaining academics, social development is key. Teens need encouragement to be involved in social activities, establish peer relationships and have a core peer group, in which they can confide and share.

Ultimately, involvement and communication with teens can prevent their involvement in risky behaviors and lead to healthy development. The National Youth and Anti-Drug Media Campaign has put together 4 basic principles that promote this healthy development, and are as follows.

### PRINCIPLE 1: TUNE INTO YOUR TEEN

Teens need to know that parents are interested in what they do, who they know, and are curious about their thoughts and ideas. This is not to say that teens will always be receptive to this, but even in times of disagreement or resentment, teens are listening and remembering what is said. Take the steps to maintain a positive relationship with your teen.

- Spend time together
- Think before you speak, talk openly and honestly, and use positive,

respectful language when disciplining or during arguments

- Acknowledge what teens are saying, validate their thoughts and opinions
- Acknowledge the positive qualities of your teen, what they do well, and their positive choices

### PRINCIPLE 2: GUIDE YOUR TEEN

Teens are navigating their environments with limited experience, structure and limits enable them to deal with new situations and challenges. Communicating the expectations to teens is the most important, they must be aware of what the expectations are, and it opens up a dialogue of what they may be facing.

- With your teen, discuss and set house rules and define specific consequences when rules are broken
- Be specific about expectations and rules associated with substance use
- Follow through, rules and expectations are only successful when they are consistent
- Monitor your teen: know who their friends are, be familiar with the adults they have contact with (teachers, coaches, friends' parents), know what

## 4 principles that promote this healthy development in TEENS

**PRINCIPLE 1:  
TUNE INTO YOUR TEEN**

**PRINCIPLE 2:  
GUIDE YOUR TEEN**

**PRINCIPLE 3:  
RESPECT YOUR TEEN**

**PRINCIPLE 4:  
BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL**

Source: The National Youth and Anti-Drug Campaign

activities they are involved in socially and online

- Stress the importance of your teen calling you in unsafe or risky situations

### PRINCIPLE 3: RESPECT YOUR TEEN

Throughout the teenage years, teens are forming ideas, beliefs and opinions. They want to be heard and validated. While as parents you may not agree with these ideas and opinions, it is extremely important to listen to your teen and allow them the space to develop and express their beliefs and opinions. Providing your teen with respect, allows them to feel self-respect as well.

- Allow your teen to be an individual, give them the space and privacy they need to grow
- Encourage your teen to develop and express their own ideas and opinions
- Make the time to listen to them

*Parenting Matters columns are not intended as a substitute for therapy. If your child is experiencing problems, seek help from your pediatrician, child psychotherapist, clinical social worker or psychiatrist.*

- Be responsive to their fears and concerns

**PRINCIPLE 4:  
BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL**

Remember that actions speak louder than words. Even as teenagers, your children are watching, listening and mimicking your behavior. Set a good example by making healthy choices for yourself and maintaining positive relationships and interactions with others. Act as a model for your teenager, live by the expectations you have set for them.

- Respect is give and take, demonstrate respect in all aspects of your daily life
- Be responsible, make informed decisions

- Maintain a clear message about substance use, acknowledge age and legal guidelines
- Remember that you are first and foremost a parent, not a friend

*Laurie Henry is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and is currently the Assistant Director of Youth Services for The Town of Lexington. A graduate of the University of New Hampshire and Boston College, Laurie has a background in mental health counseling and consultation with children, adolescents and families. She can be reached at (781)861-2742.*

# resource guide

**RESOURCES**

Human Services Department  
781-1861-0194

Charlotte Rodgers, Rn, Ma  
Director Of Human Services

Emily Lavine, LICSW  
Asst. Director Of Human Services  
781-861-0194

Laurie Henry, LICSW  
Asst. Director Of Youth Services  
781-861-2742

Carrie Johnson, LICSW  
Asst. Director Of Senior Services

Lexington Police Dept:  
781-862-1212

Christina Demambro:  
Family Services Detective

Jim Rettman  
Resource Officer- High School  
781-862-1212

Lexington Fire Dept:  
781-862-0272

Tim Johnson  
Juvenile Firesetter Caseworker  
781-862-0272

Lexington Recreation Dept:  
781-862-0500

Lexpress:  
Gail Wagner  
781-861-1210

Lexington Public Schools:  
781-861-2320

Linda Chase  
Director Of Student Services  
781-861-2580 X 231

Les Eggleston  
Director Of Guidance  
781-861-2320 X 1561

Julie Fenn  
Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist  
781-861-2320 X 6080

Community Resources  
Cary Memorial Library  
781-862-6288

Dept. Of Transitional Assistance (Dta)  
Malden Office  
800-249-2007  
781-388-7375

Hayden Recreation Center  
781-862-8480

Lexington Interfaith Food Pantry  
781-861-5060

Munroe Center For The Arts  
781-862-6040

**HOTLINE NUMBERS:**

Advocates Psychiatric Emergency Services  
675 Main Street, Waltham, Ma  
1-800-540-5806  
(781)893-2003

Department Of Children & Families  
Arlington Office  
800-769-4615

Parental Stress Line  
24 Hour Hotline  
800-632-8188

Poison Control  
800-222-1222

Reach Beyond Domestic Violence  
24 Hour Hotline  
800-899-4000

Safelink  
A 24 Hour, Multilingual Hotline  
877-785-2020

Samaritans  
24 Hour Crisis Hotline For Teens  
800-252-8336