



Staying Connected

A Guide for Parents on Raising
an Adolescent Daughter



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“Adolescent girls
aren’t what they
used to be.”

Introduction

As a group, adolescents today typically enter puberty earlier, lead a more pampered life, and are exposed to more overt violence and sex in the media than any generation before them. Yet, most adolescent girls are not as mature as one would think. Their emotional development does not always keep pace with their physical growth and the quickly changing world around them. In addition, they remain in school longer (more than two-thirds go on to college), so have less experience with adult responsibilities than the girls who came before.

Not everything has changed, however. Adolescent girls still tend to challenge authority, dress like clones, and compare themselves incessantly with their peers. They also are lively, creative, caring, and intensely secretive. And they still need guidance and support from their parents. Grandparents, extended families, and mentors are also important to an adolescent girl, serving as a support system and sometimes substituting for a missing parent. As always, love and understanding remain essential.

Keeping the communication lines open can help your daughter be more candid with you about what she is doing and feeling. You may find she confides in you more easily when you are engaged in some activity together, such as preparing dinner or driving somewhere. It doesn't matter

what you talk about. It's the talking together that counts. Furthermore, your parenting style will have to adapt as your daughter learns to make decisions on her own and grows more independent. What worked with her as a 12-year-old will not be effective when she is 16. So it's not just your daughter who will be changing.

The great majority of children come through adolescence without significant turmoil—the kind that can leave long-lasting scars.

Through it all, your daughter's life experiences and her inborn temperament—in other words, her personality—play a great part. There are children, for example, who can't help but strive to accomplish; others are more laid back about getting from here to there. Some are shy. Some are impulsive. Take your child's personality into account. The last thing a tightly wired child needs, for example, is chaotic surroundings. An artistic child flourishes when allowed to think outside the box.

If you are not now actively engaged with your daughter, remember: It's never too late to start. This booklet provides some information based on the latest research on how adolescent girls grow, plus some tips on helping them grow up to be healthy, resilient women.

Recommendations for additional reading appear at the end.

“Suddenly, she’s
not my little girl
anymore.”

Puberty

Puberty, nature's way of transforming children into adults, today tends to start for White girls around age 11½, from 6 months to a year younger than it did for their mothers. (There are a number of theories as to why this is happening, but no one yet has the answer.) Black and Hispanic girls come into puberty about a year earlier than White girls, and Asian American girls somewhat later. This biological event also marks the onset of adolescence, a period of life that extends to the end of the teens and brings the budding young woman into a new world of relationships.

Although adolescence is an exuberant time of life for the most part, puberty itself can be an awkward and confusing time for girls as they adjust to their changing bodies and new social roles. Body mass increases, and fat shifts to breasts and hips even as girls spurt in height. With legs and arms invariably the first to start growing rapidly, many girls look ungainly for a while. Typically, menstruation, as it has for many generations, ensues on average at 12½ years or when weight hits approximately 105 pounds, bringing hormonal adjustments that can affect emotions.

But by far the greatest change in adolescence occurs in the growth of the brain, especially in the front of the brain, the seat of reasoning, judgment, self-control, and social behavior. As they mature, girls also learn gender roles and stereotypes, basically what society considers the roles and responsibilities of women to be.

A father's involvement throughout his daughter's life is important. His relationship with his daughter is associated with a girl's work success, occupational competency, and sense of comfort and mastery of the world around her.

How You Can Help

There is no substitute for a parent, and single parents must be especially diligent about carving out occasions when they can spend time with a daughter one on one.

- ✓ For girls without fathers, there are usually healthy male role models to be found among relatives, teachers, and coaches.
- ✓ Mothers, of course, should take a reasonably cautious approach to letting a male into their daughter's life.

**“She is always trying
to please her
new best friend.”**

Peer Groups

As adolescents pull away from their parents, their friendships become a safe haven. Before long, girls tend to join others with whom they think they have much in common. They not only dress alike; they also behave alike and form clubs, or cliques, some with secret codes or rituals.

A need to be liked is paramount, and a peer group has much influence on the adolescent girl's response to the issues of teen life. The right friendships can minimize a girl's vulnerability to the temptations she must deal with, especially if her relationship with the group is long term. Youth, church, or other organized groups can offer additional support, especially to shy girls or those with disabilities, who may need extra assistance in meeting and getting together with others.

Part of growing up is choosing one's own friends. The more you try to choose them for your daughter or voice your disapproval of the friendships she has made, the more she may rebel.

Although some teens use the computer to stay in constant contact with friends, overuse of the computer poses an obstacle to developing peer relationships. Just as with TV, children who prefer to stay at home in front of a monitor rather than spend time with friends can become isolated from the mainstream, with a concomitant slowdown in developing socialization and communication skills.

How You Can Help

- ✓ If you don't like her friends, invite them over and get to know them. You may discover they are perfectly acceptable even if they don't fit your criteria to a T.
- ✓ If you think her friends may lead your daughter into danger, voice your concerns about her safety firmly and clearly so you can protect her as best you can. Forbidding her to see them probably won't work.
- ✓ Many parents are locating the computer in a general area of the house rather than in a child's room so that they can oversee its use and look over a child's shoulder once in a while.
- ✓ Suggest a specific "contract" with your daughter about her computer use. She must agree not to give out personal information while online and decline to meet anyone she's met online without your approval.
- ✓ Numerous types of software are available to limit the time the computer can be used or the Internet sites that can be visited, including chat rooms. Despite all the attention in the media, only a minute number of girls are lured away from home by men they meet in chat rooms. Nevertheless, you must warn your daughter of the consequences just in case she is tempted, if not in your own home, then by someone else's computer.

“How do I
make her
understand how
great she is?”

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem does not appear overnight nor does it develop in a vacuum. We all begin to build a sense of self-value early in life as parents applaud our accomplishments and encourage us to move further into the world.

Come adolescence, your daughter will develop more confidence as she discovers her ability to handle new responsibilities and trusts herself in new situations. Ideally, she should be able to decide on things that affect her as long as they are not dangerous or illegal. If she is never allowed to decide for herself, a girl will look to others to make decisions for her.

However, pressures to fit in, achieve (or not) in school, compete for (and be non-threatening to) boys, and conform to society's other expectations can all chip away at a girl, especially when she is not confident that she is sufficiently attractive, popular, talented, socially adept, or loved at home. As a result, self-esteem can drop dramatically in high school, along with grades.

Some girls take longer to develop independence and the self-worth that goes with it. Sometimes problems can exceed a girl's capacity to handle them. Girls, too, may become excessively self-conscious and unsure because of trouble at home, poor role models, and a physical or learning disability. These girls especially need strong guidance, encouragement, and help with discovering their gifts. And all girls need to know that they are equal to boys in ability and are not bound to pursue female-dominated occupations.

A strong ethnic or racial identity appears to help minority girls maintain more self-

worth than those from the dominant society. Hispanic girls, for example, find a large source of strength in the extended family. Black girls, in turn, seem to carry a tradition of strength going back to a slave society where women were valued for their strength and had to be strong to survive. In general, minority girls who do not try to conform to the White ideal of beauty better withstand the pressure to conform to the expectations of the broader society. In similar fashion, culture and tradition often remain a source of protection for first- and second-generation immigrant children despite tension with parents over traditional versus American adolescent customs.

How You Can Help

As parents, you can bolster your daughter's confidence as you begin the process of letting her go.

- ✓ Encourage her to be true to herself and to her origins.
- ✓ Listen to her. You probably have dreams for her, but she also has her own dreams. Respect them, along with her thoughts, ideas, and feelings even though she will make mistakes along the way. Every child falls and then discovers balance as she learns to walk.
- ✓ As the pressure builds, fathers as well as mothers can help their daughters value themselves. As their daughter's first male admirer, a father should focus attention on who she is on the inside, not just on how she looks. Girls learn about the power relation between males and females from the men in their lives.

“She keeps looking
at herself sideways
in the mirror.”

Body Image

Many adolescent girls—particularly White girls—equate feeling good about themselves with having a perfect body, primarily a slim one. The pubescent body, however, betrays them. In response, some girls go on crash diets and exercise compulsively.

Occasionally, crash dieting can get out of hand, in extreme cases leading to anorexia nervosa (severe dieting even when emaciated) and bulimia (bingeing and purging). Both types of disordered eating typically start in adolescence, but develop into full-blown anorexia or bulimia in only a very small percent of cases.

What is less well-known is that twice as many (14%) adolescent girls today are overweight as in 1994, a situation probably brought on by a near-addiction to fast food coupled with America's increasingly sedentary lifestyle. Girls who have been overweight from infancy also tend to carry their excess weight into adolescence, while some become obese by eating compulsively. Furthermore, few people are aware that restaurant portions are ballooning, a concern now that we are eating more meals outside the home.

No single cause of anorexia, bulimia, or obesity has been identified. But we do know that girls with low self-esteem are more likely to develop an eating disorder than their happier, better-adjusted peers.

However, whether they are too thin, too heavy, or somewhere in between, most adolescents don't eat right. Girls are more likely than boys to eat their fruit and vegetables, but are less likely to drink milk.

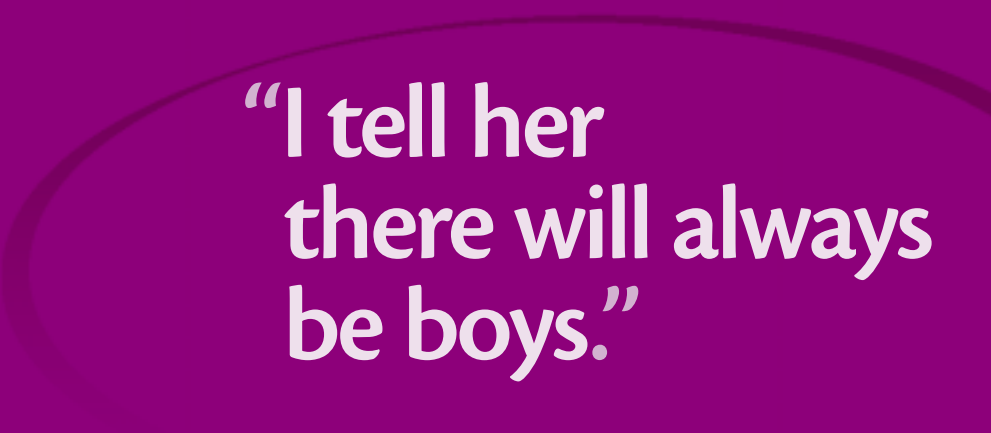
(Boys drink more milk, but use it to wash down fried foods and junk foods.)

Adolescence is a crucial period for bone development, and girls need four to five glasses of milk a day, or the equivalent amount of calcium in other foods.

How You Can Help

- ✓ Consult your pediatrician or other physician for sensible dietary guidelines.
- ✓ Work with your school in developing comprehensive health and nutrition programs both in the classroom and the cafeteria.
- ✓ Keep healthy snacks around the house, avoid junk food, and try to keep processed foods (reconstituted items often loaded with fat, sugar, and sodium) at a minimum.
- ✓ Be positive. Explain to your daughter how her body is changing and what it needs.
- ✓ Empower her to assume responsibility for her own nutrition. Encourage her to go out for sports. Studies show that female athletes are more comfortable with their bodies than less active girls; they appreciate what their body can do and feel better in their own skin. Exercise also helps build strong bones.

Disordered eating habits, of course, need the attention of a mental health specialist. Fortunately, the sooner an eating disorder is diagnosed and treated, the better the chances for a positive outcome.



**“I tell her
there will always
be boys.”**

Sexuality

On top of the other issues your teenage daughter is facing, the first years of adolescence are also when feelings of sexual attraction begin. Increased interest in sexual topics and sexual relationships is normal and inevitable. Girls can develop crushes on boys, or on other girls, or on adults like their teachers. It is all part of a natural process that helps a girl see herself as a sexual being, that is, someone capable of an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction with another person. Many lesbians and bisexuals become aware of their sexual orientation during childhood or adolescence.

Dating is a way in which adolescents develop and test their interpersonal skills and learn about intimacy. On the other hand, dating also opens the door to the initiation of sexual activity. Educating your daughter about sexuality and sexual relations goes beyond the physical aspects and extends to its emotional, ethical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. Some parents, for example, ask their daughter to abstain from sex until marriage. Others realize that sexual activity in the later years of adolescence may occur, so they emphasize the need for her to practice safe sex.

An abstinence movement is re-emerging in this country, and many church organizations and other groups are sponsoring virginity pledges for teen girls and boys.

A study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has found that the pledges do appear to delay sexual activity, although they seem to be more effective if girls sign them before age 16 or 17. Pledges aside, adolescents who are more religious or less physically developed also seem to delay intercourse.

How You Can Help

The primary source of information for a daughter about love, relationships, sexual behaviors, and attitudes comes from her parents and the way they interact. (Or, in the case of single parents, the way they behave with significant others.) This allows parents to be the first to teach their values and beliefs about sexuality to their daughter before anyone else does.

- ✓ As always, open communication during childhood and through adolescence will help you define and augment the information your daughter has already received from watching you and from listening to myriad other voices. Providing an accepting environment at home will further enable her to feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics with you.

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How You Can Help

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- ✓ Starting with pubescence, girls tend to turn more to their mothers than to their fathers. A single father should support his daughter in finding women such as an aunt, teacher, or coach who can provide her with the female role that can help in developing identity. But fathers should remain involved. Without a father's continuing interest in her, many teen girls start seeking inappropriate male attention outside the house.
- ✓ Research shows that teens who feel connected to their family and school are less likely to initiate premature sexual activity.
- ✓ Many parents and psychologists believe that teens need a reason to say "No" to early or premarital sex. Let your daughter know what is at stake. If your teenager is having sexual relations, maintain an open and honest dialogue about safe behaviors.
- ✓ Parents should set appropriate curfews for dating, allowing their daughter to enter the relationship waters gradually, first through group activities and later as one-half of a couple. Younger adolescents, even those who have physically matured, are not emotionally prepared for a one-on-one romantic involvement.

“One day she’s sunny,
the next day she’s
banging doors.”

Mood Swings

Most adolescents swing between happy and sad from one day to the next, or even within a few hours. Among the triggers are the dramatic changes they see in their physical selves and the new relationships they are forming. Changes in hormones, sometimes extreme, also play a significant role in how she feels.

In addition, adolescents have not yet developed a perspective on how their experiences fit into the greater scheme of things. The adolescent girl may feel that life couldn't be better when she scores high on an exam, or that it couldn't be worse when she doesn't make the team. Her responses make great sense to her, although they may seem overly dramatic to you. Being snubbed by a friend, for example, can be just as calamitous to her as your learning you are losing your job.

Sometimes a girl's low mood will make it difficult for her to carry on with her normal activities and relationships. If it lasts more than two weeks, she may be suffering from depression and not the blues. Depression is a physical illness in which some of the chemicals transmitted from one neuron to another become unbalanced. A predisposition to depression, sometimes genetically based, seems to play a part in the illness, as do negative events or prolonged stress. In extreme cases, depression can lead to suicide.

Stress can also have an effect on a teenager's life. The intense focus on tests today is increasing stress levels in many students, but just about anything can act as a stressor. Switching to a new school or dealing with a prolonged illness in the family are stressful situations. Stress can occur even when all appears to be going well. A girl can get tired from constant efforts to keep up in school or with her friends.

How You Can Help

- ✓ By listening to your daughter, you can share in her joys. If she is anxious or sad, help her identify her problems clearly and with some perspective.
- ✓ Stay calm. Let her know that frequent ups and downs are normal during adolescence, and that stress is part of life. Help her adjust her expectations of life, of herself, and of you. If appropriate, suggest she develop a realistic problem-solving plan for whatever may be troubling her.
- ✓ Parents also get stressed. Children, relatives, and jobs make demands on your time and strength, and you will need time out for yourself. Parents who work outside the home can come home still caught up in their other world. The children need your attention, but try to take a few minutes for yourself before shifting back into your parental role.

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How You Can Help

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- ✓ If you think your daughter may be depressed, have her evaluated by a mental health professional. Depression is a very treatable illness, usually with psychotherapy, medication, or a combination of the two. Starting early has long-term benefits.
- ✓ The same mechanism that can turn on stress also turns it off. Learning practical coping skills or developing a relaxation response are among the stress-management techniques teenagers can draw on to help short-cut anxiety. A consultation with a mental health professional is wise if your daughter appears to be overanxious or otherwise not handling stress well.
- ✓ Don't wait until your daughter is troubled to reach out to her. Throughout her life, use every available opportunity to help her develop her inner resources so that she can fall back on her own strengths when life seems to go awry. Supportive personal relationships and healthy coping skills will also help her come through the hard times.

**“If she thinks it,
she will do it.”**

Rebellion

Rebellion is one way adolescents discover who they are and become separate and independent people. It is one of their major developmental tasks, although not always pleasant for parents to endure. Rare is the teenager who does not rebel, at least in small ways, on the way to adulthood.

Teenage rebellion, too, may be a matter of perception, depending on whether parents see their daughter as a small child or an emerging adult. Growing up involves developing independent opinions and voicing ideas that differ from those of parents. This is not necessarily an act of rebellion, especially if girls are expected to become independent and assertive women. Many girls say they are not rebellious at all: They are simply expressing their views. Some are actually seeking reassurance from their parents, not shock or anger.

The extent to which your daughter rebels depends on many factors. Among them are her own personality, peer relationships, adult role models, and your parenting style. Examples of healthy rebellion would be purple hair or a “Keep Out” sign on her bedroom door.

As they grow older, adolescent girls need to have greater control over their lives. They may roll their eyes at what you say to them (you’re only a parent so what do you know), but it is a myth that teens must fight their parents to the limit in order to reach adulthood successfully. Parents should be careful not to label a healthy push toward independence as untenable. A teenager who doesn’t rebel may be afraid to grow up or may think she has no safety net in case she trips and falls.

Extreme rebellion, which is rare, can often be traced to either overly permissive or excessively controlling parenting styles. A girl who does not have boundaries to rebel against can use rebellion to push her parents to provide structure. Parents who exert extreme and seemingly arbitrary control limit their daughter’s self-expression and create a forbidden-fruit scenario where she wants a taste of everything denied her.

How You Can Help

Parents can do a number of things to create an environment that does not push their daughter to act inappropriately yet still nurtures her need for increased independence.

- ✓ One is to set reasonable and age-appropriate limits.
- ✓ Another is to provide predictable expectations and consequences.

Your daughter will likely balk at the rules, but she needs them. It is your job to define the difference between her having her own ideas and disobeying the rules. A gradual and healthy expansion of both freedom and responsibility can allow your daughter the space she needs to grow.

“Why would
she do that?”

Risk-Taking

Risk-taking should not be confused with rebellion, although the line between the two can be murky. Basically, rebellion involves moving away from your parents. Risk-taking, which is yet another major developmental task, is about moving toward something without thinking of the consequences.

Furthermore, there is a difference between risk-taking that is sound and exploratory and risk-taking that is dangerous. Examples of healthy risk-taking are running for a school office, applying for a job, or deciding to leave a peer group and strike out to make new friends.

Overall, dangerous risk-taking is down among both adolescent boys and girls, and many of today's teenagers seem never to take unhealthy risks. Nevertheless, the greatest threat to an adolescent girl's well-being today stems from embracing behaviors that were once more the domain of boys than of girls: drinking, drinking and driving, doing drugs, driving recklessly, smoking cigarettes, and engaging in premarital sex. Combine the need to take risks with underdeveloped judgment skills, and you have a troublesome mix.

Why are young people attracted to something that could harm or kill them? Some teens think these behaviors are cool. Others like to smoke because it depresses the appetite. Along with pressure from a boyfriend, the earlier onset of puberty could help account for early and unsafe sexual behavior. A large factor, as ever, remains hanging with the wrong peer group.

Teenagers also take risks just because they are teenagers, possibly because of the way the teenage brain is wired. Rarely is risk-taking synonymous with antisocial behavior, that is, with violent, destructive, or illegal activities. Some children are just born with a greater propensity to take risks that continues through life. There are entire families who are risk-takers.

The good news is that "anti-" campaigns and school programs promoting safe behaviors seem to be taking hold. The rate of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, for example, is dropping as more adolescents delay intercourse or practice safe sex.

How You Can Help

To offset dangerous risk-taking, parents can help their daughters simply by being there. Knowing what is going on in her life is the most effective thing you can do to keep your daughter physically and emotionally safe.

- ✓ Assure her not everyone her age "is doing it" even though it seems that way to her.
- ✓ Encourage positive risk-taking.
- ✓ Having a solid relationship with your daughter, preferably begun when she was young, can help her make judgment calls when you are not there to supervise. At the least, it will keep the door open for her to talk to you about the issues she faces.

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How You Can Help

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- ✓ Parents should be able to speak frankly with their children about addictive substances. Most important, set a good example.
- ✓ Establish a pattern of asking and, as much as possible, knowing where your daughter is and whom she's with.
- ✓ Searching an adolescent's room or insisting on a drug test should not be undertaken lightly. Teenage girls need their privacy. Still, you have a job to protect your child.
- ✓ Sometimes, alcohol or drug abuse is a sign of a serious psychological disorder that should be treated by a mental health professional.

The highest rate of automobile accidents occurs among teens age 15 to 16. Some parents are informing their teenage daughter that she is not to carry passengers in her car in her first year of driving; she has to concentrate on the business at hand. Then they allow one passenger to be added for each six months of problem-free driving (e.g., no moving violations). They also tell her she is not to be a passenger in a car driven by another new driver.

“She’s dealing
with issues
I never had.”

Violence

Verbal aggression such as bullying, teasing, shunning, and backbiting is increasing among girls. Overt violence remains mainly a male thing, but an adolescent girl might accept violent behavior because of low self-esteem or because she believes she deserves it. If she has been a victim of violence herself or observed it at home, she may think that getting beaten up is a way of life.

Another kind of violence aimed at women is date rape. Again, young girls exposed early to abuse are especially at risk, as are those with low self-esteem and poor communication skills. An overpossessive or controlling boyfriend are signs that often precede physical abuse.

Compounding these factors are alcohol or drugs, including Rohypnol, or “roofies,” tablets that, when slipped into a girl’s drink, render her unconscious or semiconscious and susceptible to attack. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that adolescents have the nation’s highest rate of rape, with one in five high school girls sexually abused by her date in 1999.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the latest government data suggest that a disturbing number of adolescent boys “have adopted attitudes that men are entitled to their girlfriends through violence.”

How You Can Help

- ✓ Meet your daughter’s friends and help her make good judgments about peers, especially boys.
- ✓ Discuss good relationships before she gets involved with boys so that your comments are not directed against a specific person. Help her understand that she must be adamant about any unwanted advances.
- ✓ An open dialogue with your daughter can help you find out if she is in a healthy relationship or if you have to alert her to danger.
- ✓ Be sure she has cab fare and can call home if she’s in trouble.

If date rape does occur, make sure she realizes it is NOT her fault. She should know to immediately contact the local rape crisis center. The telephone number is usually located in the front of the Yellow Pages on the Community Services Page under the heading “Crisis Assistance.” The Rape, Abuse, and Assistance National Network (RAINN) also offers a toll-free hotline (1-800-656-HOPE) that routes callers to the nearest counseling center.

**“I wear \$15 jeans;
hers cost \$50.”**

Money Management

Today's adolescent girls are—or would like to be—big spenders, primarily on clothes, food, and entertainment, in that order. In many ways, they are mimicking the more affluent society around them. Hanging out in malls is starting to give way to hanging out in stores with sofas, vending machines, and sometimes even a deejay in the teen department. Promotional blitzes from credit card companies are targeted at them. It's not surprising that few teens understand money except how to spend it, and many parents fear that their children are losing sight of what is really important in life.

One-half of teenage girls work part-time and often see their earnings augmented by their parents. Allowances, however, may have gone the way of 45 rpm records. Instead of a set amount, many parents hand out dollars regularly, a little here for a CD and a little there for a dress. Moreover, some girls have their own credit card or a parent's card, freeing them to run up bills they cannot pay, and surveys show an apparent lack of understanding of financial concepts.

Of course, some girls in less well-off families may have to work for all their pocket money or contribute their earnings to the family income. In the long run, however, any teen who has to be careful with money is learning valuable lessons.

How You Can Help

Learning to budget, save, and invest money is vital to your daughter's becoming a self-reliant and self-sufficient person.

- ✓ One way to help her is to return to an old-fashioned allowance, tying the weekly amount to an adolescent's age. For example, a 15-year-old might receive \$15. Or you could adjust this sum according to the cost of living in your area. In some families, the teen sets aside 10% for charity, with the remainder divided into impulse spending, long-term savings for a car or college, and short-term savings for items like a CD player or computer.
- ✓ Help her set up a checking account and teach her how to balance it.
- ✓ Think twice before giving your teenager access to a credit card. You and your daughter could be paying off major bills for years.

“I want my
daughter to have a
higher purpose.”

Spirituality

Parents want their children to be moral people and think beyond themselves. Most hope that these values will come from a religious belief. Religiosity also seems to have long-term benefits affecting sexual behavior, coping skills, social competence, self-esteem, and identity issues. Research shows that adolescent girls tend to be more actively religious than boys and maintain their belief systems over longer periods of time. Nevertheless, part of a girl's separation from family may involve a resistance to the parents' culture, in many cases including their religion.

How You Can Help

- ✓ To avoid driving a daughter in the opposite direction, parents may do better by not trying to force their beliefs. Rather, they can allow their daughter to consider for herself what she believes in and what she thinks.
- ✓ Often, she will come up with opinions similar to those of her parents who, after all, provided the base upon which she will build. In the long run, most adolescents return to parental values.

**“She knows how to
push my buttons.”**

Setting Limits

Adolescents need limits on their behavior—limits that stick. Don't wait for a crisis to put limits in place. Whenever possible, discuss the rules you intend to set and the actions you will take if they are flouted. Be sure to also explain that girls are more vulnerable than boys and need more safeguards in certain situations. Praise her when she sticks with the boundaries you have decided on.

Your bargaining position will be better if you find out what other parents of teenage girls are doing. Meanwhile, you'll be giving your daughter the opportunity to practice her own negotiating skills on you.

Younger adolescent girls should be supervised in settings where behavior you disapprove of can happen. Set up a network of parents who will cooperate. Your daughter should always let you know where she is going, with whom, and when she'll be home. The cell phone is a handy monitor.

If your daughter transgresses—and she probably will—make the consequence fit the behavior. This approach usually works better than taking privileges away, and teaches an important lesson about how the real world works. Be fair and reasonable, especially if she was caught up in a situation that she was powerless to control.

Sometimes an adolescent's behavior can be so frustrating you may be tempted to strike her. People have a variety of opinions about this, but the reality is that hitting your child sends a confusing message, namely, that it is okay to hit someone you love in order to control them. Repeated over time, it can train children to punish others with force, or to accept force from others as punishment. Simply put, there are more effective means of discipline that do not have the potential long-term negative consequences of violence.

Parents confronted by a daughter who seems to be out of control—not attending school or running around with an out-of-control crowd, for example—can do several things. They can talk. They can listen. But they will likely need to call for help. A psychologist, a minister, or some other respected adult outside the family situation may be able to help.

For further reading

Books and booklets

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Is youth violence just another fact of life?
(Part of series, Clarifying the debate:
Psychology examines the issues.)
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About this brochure

Staying Connected: A Guide for Parents on Raising an Adolescent Daughter was prepared by the American Psychological Association and distributed to coincide with the broadcast premiere of *5 Girls*, a documentary film about adolescent girls. The film, produced by Kartemquin Educational Films and directed by Maria Finitzo, is a presentation of P.O.V. (Point of View), the PBS award-winning showcase for nonfiction films. The premier broadcast will air in October 2001.

The film documents the lives of five young women, Corrie, Toby, Amber, Haibinh, and Aisha. Viewers follow the girls through their everyday lives and the challenges, stress, and hopes and expectations for their futures. For more information about *5 Girls* or how to obtain a copy of the film, contact:

Kartemquin Films
1901 West Wellington Street
Chicago, IL 60657
(773) 472-4366
or www.Kartemquin.com

Visit the *5 Girls* Website at
www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V.



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