

## Tips to Parents

In addition to improving communication, there are actions parents can take to help their adolescent through the teenage years. The old saw, "actions speak louder than words," is particularly appropriate where parental influence on children is concerned.

- **Try to set a good example.** Children learn by what they see. Too often people say one thing and do another. "Do as I say and not as I do" will not carry much weight. Eventually children will ask such questions as "What's wrong with smoking pot when my parents get stoned on alcohol?"
- **Supervise and guide.** Although teenagers are capable of handling certain privileges and responsibilities, they still need help in setting limits on their freedom and behavior. Deciding with the teenager what these limits and policies are usually elicits more reasonable attitudes. Moderate and selective guidance is one of the best ways to prevent a breakdown of communication.
- **Communicate, in words and actions, what you expect of your children.** Although teenagers may appreciate a share in some decision making, they do not want parents to give up authority or to be wishy-washy. Parents who appear confused about firmness and discipline, who are inconsistent, or who disagree between themselves can be perceived as weak and divided. Teenagers need the security of knowing where their parents stand and what parents expect of them.
- **Respect the adolescent's desire for individuality and independence.** Parents do, and should, attempt to influence their children, but this is quite different from trying to force them into preconceived molds to fit parents' desires. Parents can accept and respect their teenagers as individuals without accepting all their ideas. The reverse is also true; teens can maintain respect for parents while rejecting some of their beliefs. One expert in family problems suggests that parents assume the role of watchful bystanders, ready to come forward when help is needed.
- **Take an interest in your children's activities and friends.** This helps to reduce the distance between the generations, since it demonstrates your acceptance of their world. Give the youngsters time to be with their friends and make their friends welcome when they come to visit. Taking an interest in your children's activities and friends does not mean taking on the role of friend or invading your child's privacy. Teenagers need separateness and privacy just as parents do.
- **Try not to overreact.** Many parents brace themselves for the onslaught of adolescence, convinced that it is bound to be a long, hard struggle. Consequently, they are quick to over-react the first time their teenager steps out of line. They punish severely, withdraw trust, and lose confidence in the youngster, thus severing the lines of communication. It is only natural for adolescents to test their parents' authority while trying to assert themselves. At the same time, they are trying out their own competence. Parents must let their children make mistakes – and at the same time be ready to help when help is needed.

It is not realistic to expect complete harmony between the generations. Nor is it pleasant to live through a period of bickering and strain, no matter how temporary. When both parents and teenagers make efforts to communicate and respect each other, adolescence can be an exciting period of discovery for all concerned.

