

# Monitoring Your Teen's Activities: What Parents and Families Should Know



The teen years are a time of rapid growth, exploration, and risk taking. Taking risks provides young people the opportunity to test their skills and abilities and discover who they are. But, some risks—such as smoking, using drugs, drinking and driving, and having unprotected sex—can have harmful and long-lasting effects on a teen's health and well-being.

Parents are a powerful influence in the lives of their teens. When parents make a habit of knowing about their teens—what they are doing, who they are with, and where they are and setting clear expectations for behavior with regular check-ins to be sure these expectations are being met—they can reduce their teens' risks for injury, pregnancy, and drug, alcohol, and cigarette use. These parents are **monitoring** their teens' activities and behavior.

To learn more about how parents can better monitor their teens, CDC sponsored a panel of leading academic researchers in the field of parental monitoring. The findings from this expert panel led to the development of a book entitled, *Parental Monitoring of Adolescents: Current Perspectives for Researchers and Practitioners*.<sup>1</sup> The following information reflects key findings and recommendations from this book.

## **What is parental monitoring?**

Parental monitoring includes 1) the expectations parents have for their teen's behavior; 2) the actions parents take to keep track of their teen; and 3) the ways parents respond when their teen breaks the rules.

You are using parental monitoring when you ask your teen

- Where will you be?
- Whom will you be with?
- When will you be home?

You are also monitoring when you

- Check in with your teen by phone.
- Get to know his or her friends and their parents.
- Talk with your teen about how he or she spends time or whether he or she is making safe choices.
- Set and enforce rules for your teen's behavior by clearly explaining the rules and consequences and following through with appropriate consequences when the rules are broken.

Monitoring should start in early childhood and continue throughout the teen years, evolving as children grow and mature. As children develop into teenagers, adults might view them as more independent and less in need of monitoring. But, consistent monitoring throughout the teen years is critical—teens' desire for independence can bring opportunities for unhealthy or unsafe behaviors.

### ***Does parental monitoring make a difference?***

Yes. Research shows that teens whose parents use effective monitoring practices are less likely to make poor decisions, such as having sex at an early age, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, being physically aggressive, or skipping school.<sup>2-6</sup> Clear communication about your expectations is especially important. Research shows that teens who believe their parents disapprove of risky behaviors are less likely to choose those behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

### ***What can parents do to monitor their teens effectively?***

The following are some steps you can take to monitor your teen and help protect him or her from risky behaviors:

- Talk with your teen about your rules and expectations, and explain the consequences for breaking the rules.
- Talk and listen to your teen often about how he or she feels and what he or she is thinking.
- Know who your teen's friends are.
- Talk with your teen about the plans he or she has with friends, what he or she is doing after school, and where he or she will be going.
- Set expectations for when your teen will come home, and expect a call if he or she is going to be late.
- Ask whether an adult will be present when your teen is visiting a friend's home.
- Get to know your teen's boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Get to know the parents of your teen's friends.
- Talk with your relatives, your neighbors, your teen's teachers, and other adults who know your teen. Ask them to share what they observe about your teen's behaviors, moods, or friends.
- Watch how your teen spends money.
- Keep track of how your teen spends time online, and talk about using the Internet safely.
- Pay attention to your teen's mood and behavior at home, and discuss any concerns you might have.
- If your teen does break a rule, enforce the consequences fairly and consistently.
- Make sure your teen knows how to contact you at all times.



### For more information

CDC scientists and other practitioners researched the effectiveness of parenting interventions aimed at reducing adolescent risk behaviors. For example, the resource, *Parental Monitoring of Adolescents: Current Perspectives for Researchers and Practitioners*, provides research and techniques for productive supervision within the home.

<http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-14080-5/parental-monitoring-of-adolescents>



### How can parents be successful at monitoring their teens?

Parental monitoring works best when parents have good, open, and caring relationships with their teens. Teens are more willing to talk to their parents if they think their parents can be trusted, have useful advice to offer, and are open and available to listen and talk. Teens who are satisfied with their relationships with their parents tend to be more willing to follow the rules.

You can promote a caring relationship with your teen by listening, asking questions, asking for opinions, offering support and praise, and staying involved in your teen's life.

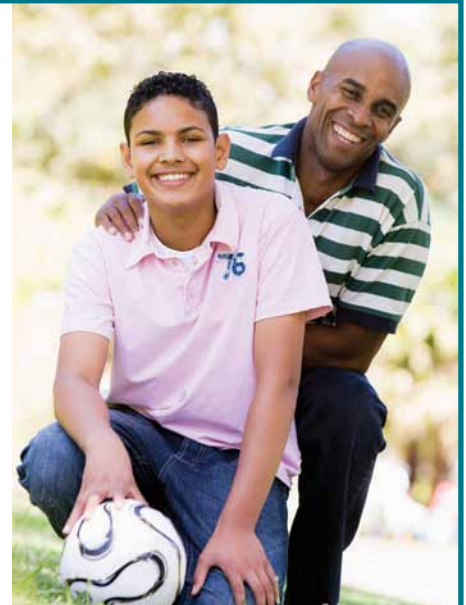
### How can busy parents monitor their teens?

As a parent, you face many competing demands on your time. Work or other activities can keep you away from home and limit monitoring of your teen. To help bridge this gap, you can use e-mails, text messages, and phone calls to check in with your teen. You can also seek the support of other family members, friends, and school staff to help monitor your teen's activities and behavior. Teens who have a variety of adults supervising and monitoring their activities may be even less likely to engage in unhealthy and unsafe behaviors.



## Where can parents get more information?

- **CDC Parent Portal—Raising Healthy Teens**  
[www.cdc.gov/parents/teens/healthy\\_children.html](http://www.cdc.gov/parents/teens/healthy_children.html)
- **Positive Parenting**  
[www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/index.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/index.html)
- **Parents of Teens**  
[www.usa.gov/Topics/Parents\\_Teens.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Parents_Teens.shtml)
- **Girl's Health Information for Parents and Caregivers**  
[www.girlshealth.gov/parents](http://www.girlshealth.gov/parents)
- **National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy**  
[www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)
- **Latino Initiative**  
[www.thenationalcampaign.org/espanol/default\\_eng.aspx](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/espanol/default_eng.aspx)
- **Healthy Children, Teen Information**  
[www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/default.aspx)
- **Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health**  
[www.clafh.org/resources-for-parents/parent-materials/](http://www.clafh.org/resources-for-parents/parent-materials/)



## References

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2. Brendgen M, Vitaro R, Tremblay RE, et al. Reactive and proactive aggression: predictions to physical violence in different contexts and moderating effects of parental monitoring and caregiving behavior. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2001;29(4):293–304.
3. Choquet M, Hassler C, Morin D, et al. Perceived parenting styles and tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among French adolescents: gender and family structure differentials. *Alcohol & Alcoholism* 2008;43(1):73–80.
4. Cota-Robles S, Gamble W. Parent-adolescent processes and reduced risk for delinquency: the effect of gender for Mexican American adolescents. *Youth & Society* 2006;37(4):375–392.
5. Li X, Feigelman S, Stanton B. Perceived parental monitoring and health risk behaviors among urban low-income African-American children and adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2000;27(1):43–48.
6. Markham CM, Lormand D, Gloppen KM, et al. Connectedness as a predictor of sexual and reproductive health outcomes for youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2010;46(3 Suppl 1):S23–S41.

