



# NEW JERSEY PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

## **Tips on Maintaining Positive Relationships as Your Kids become Teens**

By Lisa Greenberg, PhD

Even parents who have always enjoyed good relationships with their kids can start to panic as their children approach adolescence. After all, they have been barraged for years with warnings about the risks and the unpleasantness of the teen years, and they understandably doubt their ability to cope. Perhaps they remember those people in the supermarket, who told them when their kids were babies, "Sure, they're cute now but wait 'til they're teenagers," and wonder what those people knew that they didn't.

The truth is that those people knew a lot less than they thought they did. Sure, you no longer have an adorable 3-year-old riding in that shopping cart, but instead you have the pleasure of watching a brand new about-to-be adult unfold in front of you. Below are six tips to help you minimize the pain, and maximize the joy, of this stage of your family life:

1. Remember that you're already an old pro at managing the shifting relationships involved in parenting. From the moment you became a parent, you've had to figure out what your child needed from you, and you've had to continually make changes and learn new strategies as your child grew. Though people often feel that the stakes are higher with adolescents, you already have lots of the necessary skills.
2. Be alert to problems, and be available to offer help and support, but allow yourself to put aside your worries and enjoy this rapidly developing person, who will likely be in your daily life for only a few more years.
3. Stay connected, but don't helicopter. Remember that you are not responsible for everything your teen does, or fails to do. Listen and empathize, but don't solve your kids' problems for them. Encourage effort and enjoy success, while understanding that we also grow through our mistakes and failures.
4. Be a parent your child respects and admires. Your teen will want your respect and admiration as well, and will be more likely to act in ways you approve of. You'll also be more likely to know about any problems that do arise, and, as an added bonus, you'll feel good about yourself.
5. Understand that although your teens are not yet adults, they are not the children they

were just a year or two ago. If you treat your growing teens as mature and responsible people, they're more likely to act as such. You might be pleasantly surprised to learn that your 14-year-old can make dinner for the family, or that your 16-year-old can do a lot of the planning for the family vacation.

6. Remember that the single best thing you can give your child is a strong, positive relationship with you. Your teen may not show it, but he or she badly wants a parent who can be trusted and relied on. Even at difficult times, strive to find ways to have enjoyable, conflict-free time together. (Hint: Putting away electronic devices, and bringing out popcorn and a board game can help!)

***Lisa Greenberg, PhD**, is a licensed psychologist in practice in Madison, New Jersey. She has many years of experience in treating people from early adolescence through old age. Dr. Greenberg has a particular interest in working with adolescents and their parents. She is frequently quoted in the media on issues involving teens and families, and also enjoys speaking to community groups about these topics. For more information about Dr. Greenberg, please visit her website, at [www.lisargreenberg.com](http://www.lisargreenberg.com).*