



SO NOW I HAVE AN ADOLESCENT CHILD....

Help me.

'Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It is a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying the foundations of good health, physically, mentally and emotionally.'

This booklet provides support for whānau to deal with the challenges of peer pressure, maintaining positive family relationships and how to advocate for your child. This information is from:
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens>



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Helping pre-teens and teenagers manage peer pressure and peer influence

Having friends and feeling connected to a group gives teenagers a sense of belonging and being valued.

Friendships also help teenagers learn important social and emotional skills.

Coping well with peer influence is about **getting the balance right between being yourself and fitting in** with your group. Here are some ideas to help your child with this.

Build teenage confidence

[Confidence](#) can help teenagers resist negative peer influence. That's because confident teenagers can make safe, informed decisions and avoid people and situations that aren't right for them.

You can build your child's confidence by encouraging them to try new things that give them a chance at success and to keep trying even when things are hard. [Praising your child](#) for trying hard is important for building confidence too.

You can also be a role model for confidence, and show your child how to act confident as the first step towards feeling confident.

Build teenage self-compassion

[Self-compassion](#) is being kind to yourself and treating yourself with the same warmth, care and understanding you'd give to someone you care about. When teenagers have self-compassion, it can help them handle any stress and anxiety related to peer influence.

A [strong relationship with you](#) helps your child feel loved, accepted and secure. It's important for teenage self-compassion.

Keep the lines of communication open

You can do this by [staying connected](#) to your child. This helps your child feel they can come to you to talk if they're feeling pressured to do something they're uncomfortable with.

Suggest ways to say no

Your child might need to have some face-saving ways to say no if they're feeling influenced to do something they don't want to do. For example, friends might be encouraging your child to try smoking. Rather than simply saying 'No, thanks', your child could say something like, 'No, it makes my asthma worse', or 'No, I don't like the way it makes me smell'.

Give teenagers a way out

If your child feels they're in a risky situation, it might help if they can text or phone you for back-up. You and your child could agree on a coded message for those times when your child doesn't want to feel embarrassed in front of friends. For example, they could say that they're checking on a sick grandparent, but you'll know that it really means they need your help.

If your child does call you, it's important to focus on your child's positive choice to ask you for help, rather than on the risky situation your child is in. Your child is more likely to ask for help if they know they won't get into trouble.

Encourage a wide social network

If your child has the chance to develop friendships from many sources, including sport, family activities or clubs, it will mean they've got plenty of options and sources of support if a friendship goes wrong.

When you're worried about peer pressure and peer influence

Encouraging your child to have friends over and giving them space in your home can help you get to know your child's friends. This also gives you the chance to check on whether negative peer pressure and influence is an issue for your child.

Good communication and a positive relationship with your child might also encourage your child to talk to you if they're feeling negative influence from peers.

If you're worried your child's friends are a negative influence, being critical of them might push your child into seeing them behind your back. If your child thinks you don't approve of their friends, they might even want to see more of them. So it's important to **talk and listen without judging**, and gently help your child see the influence their peers are having.

This might mean **talking with your child about behaviour you don't like** rather than the people you don't like. For example, you might say, 'When you're with your friends, you often get into fights'. This can be better than saying, 'You need to find new friends'.

It can help to **compromise** with your child. For example, letting your child wear certain clothes or have their hair cut in a particular way can help them feel connected to their peers, even if you're not keen on blue hair or ripped jeans. Letting your child have some independence can reduce the chance of more risky choices.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens>

Adolescence can be a difficult time – your child is going through rapid [physical changes](#) as well as [emotional ups and downs](#). Young people aren't always sure where they fit, and they're still trying to work it out. Adolescence can also be a time when [peer influences](#) cause some stress.

During this time **your family is a secure emotional base** where your child feels loved and accepted, no matter what's going on in the rest of their life. Your family can build and support your child's [confidence](#), [resilience](#), optimism and identity.

When your family sets **rules, boundaries and standards of behaviour**, you give your child a sense of consistency, predictability, safety and belonging.

And believe it or not, **your life experiences and knowledge can be really useful** to your child – they just might not always want you to know it!

Supportive and close family relationships protect your child from [risky behaviour](#) like [alcohol and other drug use](#) and problems like [depression](#). Your support and interest in what your child is doing at school can boost their desire to do well academically too.

Building positive family relationships with teenagers: tips

The ordinary, everyday things that families do together can build and strengthen relationships with teenagers. These tips might help you and your family.

Love and appreciation

Show your child how much you love and appreciate them. This can be as simple as saying 'I love you' each night when they go to bed or giving them a high-five.

Family meals

Regular [family meals](#) are a great chance for everyone to chat about their day or about interesting stuff that's going on or coming up. If you encourage everyone to have a say, no-one will feel they're being put on the spot to talk. Also, many families find that meals are more enjoyable when the TV isn't invited and mobile phones and tablets are switched off!

Family outings

Try setting aside time for fun family outings – you could all take turns choosing activities. A weekend away together as a family can also build togetherness. Our article on [teenagers and free time](#) has more ideas for things you can do as a family.

One-on-one time

One-on-one time with your child gives you the chance to [stay connected](#) and enjoy

each other's company. It can also be a chance to share thoughts and feelings. This might be as simple as going for a walk together, watching a movie, or telling your child a story. Or you might find a regular hobby to do together, like cooking or yoga.

Celebrate your child's accomplishments

Celebrating your child's accomplishments, sharing their disappointments, and supporting their hobbies sends the message that your child's interests are important to you. You don't have to make a big deal of this – sometimes it's just a matter of showing up to watch your child play sport or music, or giving them a lift to extracurricular activities.

Family traditions

Family traditions, [routines](#) and [rituals](#) can help you and your child set aside regular dates and special times. For example, you might have a movie night together, a favourite meal or cooking session on a particular night, a family games afternoon or an evening walk together.

Household responsibilities

Agreed household responsibilities give children and teenagers the sense that they're making an important contribution to family life. These could be things like [chores](#), shopping or helping older or younger members of the family. It helps to give your child some say in which responsibilities they take on.

Family rules

Agreed-on [rules](#), limits and consequences give teenagers a sense of security, structure and predictability. They help your child know what standards apply in your family, and what will happen if they push the boundaries. When your child is involved in making your family rules, they're more likely to see them as fair and stick to them. [Negotiating](#) rules with your child can also help you to [reduce and manage conflict](#) with your child.

Family meetings

Family meetings can help to [solve problems](#). They give everyone a chance to be heard and be part of working out a solution.

Extra support

If you feel that your family really isn't connecting, you might find a family counsellor or other [family support service](#) helpful.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/communicating-relationships>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/family-life/family-relationships/relationships-with-parents-teens#building-positive-family-relationships>

Benefits of a strong parent-school relationship

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else does. Your child's teachers will want to get to know your child too.

When you have a strong and respectful relationship with your child's school and teachers, you're in a good position to **give them information to help your child get the most out of education**. You and your child's teachers can work together to support your child's learning and wellbeing.

When everybody is working together in the best interests of your child, your child is likely to reap **academic and social benefits**, like:

- regular school attendance
- positive school results
- a positive attitude towards school
- good social and relationship skills
- a sense of wellbeing
- school completion
- progression to post-secondary education like TAFE, university or an apprenticeship.

You can help your child get the most out of school by communicating and building relationships with teachers, other parents and students from the very first day. This is better than having contact with your child's school only when there's a problem, either at school or in your family.

How to build a strong parent-school relationship

You can build a parent-school relationship in several ways:

- Say hello to teachers and other staff at school pick-up and drop-off times.
- Ask teachers for information or feedback about your child, and share your child's special events or achievements outside school.
- Go to parent-teacher interviews and parent meetings.
- Check the school website, noticeboard and emails regularly.
- Be involved and help out in the school community in whatever ways you can.
- Learn more about the school by looking at its annual report, website, newsletters and so on.
- Go to school performances, school barbecues, cultural or music events, school fairs and parent seminars.

Not all parents can be involved in school as much as they'd like, but you can still let your child know that school is important to your family. [Talking about school](#) with your child, being warm and friendly at school events, and being positive about the school and its staff **sends the message that you value education** and are interested in what's happening for your child at school.

Your parent-school relationship includes contact with school staff, as well as your relationships with other parents and your child's friends. The parent-school relationship might change as your child gets older, or when things change at work or at home.

Parent-teacher interviews

[Parent-teacher interviews at primary school](#) and [parent-teacher interviews at secondary school](#) are one of the main ways that many parents find out how their child's education is going. Interviews can be a great way of getting all the important people – you, the teacher and your child – talking together.

It's important for the teacher and school to know about anything that's affecting your child's wellbeing. For example, your child might have a health condition, you might be concerned about bullying, or there might have been a change in your family, like a death, separation or divorce.

Getting involved at intermediate/secondary school

Intermediates and secondary schools are usually larger and more complex systems than primary schools, and your child will probably have different teachers for different subjects.

Who do you talk to first?

You can start by meeting with your child's home-room teacher. The home-room teacher is the person responsible for tracking your child's overall progress at school, by monitoring your child's attendance, behaviour and academic progress.

In secondary school knowing the year coordinator(s) and individual subject teachers is also important. Speaking to student wellbeing or support staff like counsellors or asking for a referral to an educational psychologist might help if you need extra support or expertise.

Attending school information nights can help you work out who in the school is responsible for different aspects of your child's care and education.

If the school has Facebook, a phone app and/or a website, this is another way of keeping in touch with what's going on at school. It might also let you directly email or message your child's teachers.

Changing relationships as your child grows

Your child will start developing more [independence](#), which might affect the way you communicate and connect with your child's school. You'll probably have less physical involvement with the school. And your child might be able to take more responsibility for communicating with their teachers.

Even if you're less involved with the school, you can keep **creating a supportive environment for education at home**. This might involve simply talking about schoolwork with your child, discussing your child's career plans and ambitions, or talking through the links between your child's schoolwork and future goals.

Being an advocate: what does it mean?

Advocacy is promoting and defending another person's rights, needs and interests.

Children often find it hard to speak up for their own rights, needs and interests. They might need someone to speak for them.

An advocate is someone who speaks up for others. An advocate might find information, go to meetings as a support person, or write letters for another person.

You can be an advocate for your child.

Advocating for your child

If you think your child is at risk of harm, isn't having their needs met, or is being denied their rights, you might need to advocate for them.

You know and understand your child better than anyone else. If people are making decisions for and about your child, you can help to make sure these decisions are in your child's best interests.

If you need to, you can get support from other people to help you advocate for your child. You could ask a family member, friend, volunteer or professional advocate to help you.

How to advocate for your child: steps

Step 1: understand the issue

Make sure you have a clear understanding of the issue your child is facing. For example, your child's school might be having difficulty managing your child's behaviour.

Step 2: think about what you want for your child

Thinking about your child's needs will help you decide what you want for your child. It's important to keep an open mind because there might be solutions that you haven't thought of. Try to get plenty of information so that you can make an informed decision about what to do. You could ask other people what they think.

For example, you might want your child to take part in the learn to swim program. Or you might want extra supervision while your child is at the program.

Step 3: present a solution

Presenting a solution is more effective than complaining. For example, you might say, 'If my child's behaviour continues to be a problem, I could come to the learn to swim program to help supervise'.

It's also important to consider whether your solution might have negative consequences for your child. For example, if you went to the program to supervise, would your child be embarrassed?

And you could think about timing. For example, would it be better for your child take part in the learn to swim program now or do it next term instead?

Advocating for your child: tips

Know your child's rights

You'll be more effective as an advocate if you know your child's rights and the rules of the system you're advocating in – for example, your state's education laws and the school's policies, or the medical support your child is entitled to.

It'll also help to find out who's responsible for what in your child's school or other services your child uses. This way you'll know who to talk to and what you can expect.

If you have time, it can help to get familiar with the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which applies in Australia. You can also check the laws in your state and territory at [Youth Law Australia](#).

Stay calm

If you stay calm and polite, people will be more open to your point of view. It's often best to ask questions and make suggestions rather than demand things. For example, you could make a demand like 'Give my daughter a place on the school cricket team'. But a suggestion might be more persuasive: 'If my daughter gets a place on the cricket team, it'll be great for the school's reputation for treating boys and girls equally'.

If you're struggling to stay calm, ask for a moment so you can calm down and gather your thoughts. If this doesn't work, you could ask for a short break, or stop the meeting and arrange another appointment.

Get organised

Prepare for meetings and take a list of points and questions to meetings. It also helps to keep written records of meetings, emails and phone calls. Include the date and time, who you spoke with or met, and what you discussed. You can also keep relevant information and reports that support your case.

You could keep all these documents on your computer, in a folder, or both.

Get support

Speaking to other parents who've had similar experiences or joining a support group can help you with useful information and emotional support. You can also get support from a volunteer or paid advocate, who can explain the law and your child's rights. This person can go to meetings with you too.

Advocacy services have professional advocates who can work with you to advocate for your child. You can find advocacy services in your area by contacting your local community centre, local council, library or neighbourhood house.

Helping children advocate for themselves

From an early age, children can advocate for themselves by saying no or making simple choices.

But self-advocating might be hard if your child doesn't understand the situation, the processes or their rights, or doesn't feel confident to speak up. These situations might come up when your child starts school or goes to the GP, for example.

Here are some ways to help children advocate for themselves.

Build your child's confidence

You can build your child's [confidence](#) by giving them responsibilities and letting them do age-appropriate things on their own – for example, going to the local shop to buy some milk, or walking the dog.

You can also encourage your child to feel confident to speak up if they feel something isn't right. One way to do this is by reading stories with your child about characters who stand up for themselves and others.

Listen to your child

[Actively listening](#) to your child shows that you care and are interested in what they have to say.

You can show your child that you've heard and understood by summarising what they've said. For example, 'Have I got this right? You feel angry because children in your class throw balls of paper at you when the teacher isn't looking'.

If you don't understand what your child is saying, ask questions and talk about it until you do.

Support your child to speak up

You can support your child by preparing them to express their point of view and ask for what they need. For example, you could help your child write down what they want to say to the teacher about the other children's behaviour. Or you could do a

role play of this situation with your child. As part of the role play you could show your child how to be calm and polite.

You can also help your child work out who they need to talk to about an issue. You could explain why this is the best person to talk to and what your child might expect the person to do or say.

If your child has any negative consequences from being an advocate for themselves, it's important to **back them up**. For example, if a teacher is annoyed with your child for mentioning that other children throw balls of paper, you could ask the teacher for an appointment to discuss the issue.

As your child practises speaking up for themselves, they'll become more confident about expressing their point of view.

Raisingchildren.net.au is a great website that has videos to support parents to engage with their child in a constructive, proactive way.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/school-education>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/communicating-relationships>