

Confronting Difficult Situations with Your Child

Confrontations happen every day in every home. But many of us are uncomfortable when it comes to confronting our teenage children. Teens sometimes make choices that put them in danger and parents have the difficult responsibility of addressing those choices and redirecting their adolescent.

New discoveries about adolescent brain development have opened up fresh ways of thinking about teen behavior, and offer new insight into how parents can help their teens understand the risks involved in the use of drugs and alcohol. For instance:

- Scientific evidence reveals that the brain is fully mature at about age 25 — much later than previously believed.
- One of the last areas of the brain to develop is the Prefrontal Cortex, which is responsible for processing information, making judgments, controlling impulses, and foreseeing consequences.

This new information illustrates the major risks of teenage substance use, including the possibility of causing permanent neurological damage to the developing brain. Concerned parents want to know how to apply these findings to real life. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America partnered with Treatment Research Institute and WGBH Educational Foundation to develop [A Parent's Guide to the Teen Brain](#). This website provides tips for applying knowledge about brain development to everyday life.

If a problem should occur and you recognize your child is experimenting or using regularly--take action. First, share your feelings of anger, fear, guilt, and frustration with another adult. It will do no good to blast your child with anger. Next, share your concerns with your child, set a consequence, and follow through. Lastly, seek support for yourself. Try to follow this formula for confrontation at home (remember **D-E-S-K**):

Describe the behavior you have observed. What you see happening. "I" statements let you express yourself without attacking your teenager. With "I" statements, you use persuasion (not control or blame) to cause a change in their behavior. You also allow them to help decide what happens next.

Express how the behavior makes you feel.

State what you would like to see happen and how you will help. What are you willing to do?

Know and communicate the consequences for not adjusting the behavior. (Know what your limits are!)

When planning these important conversations, it is wise to take time to gather your thoughts and plan what you are going to say. The **DESK** Intervention model gives you a framework to follow. Here are some suggestions to get the conversation started from Thomas Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training:

- "When you don't come home on time, I worry that something terrible has happened. What I need is for you to call me as soon as you know you're going to be late so that I know you're okay. If you don't call, you will not go out next weekend."
- "I feel like you can't hear what I have to say when you're so mad. Then I get frustrated. I need to talk about this later when we're both able to listen."
- "Because I love you and I want to keep you safe, I worry about you going to the concert. I need to know that you will obey our rules about not drinking or using drugs."

All teens make mistakes. That's how they learn. And when they do, you're bound to be mad. But keep your emotions in check. Avoid making empty threats or you'll lose credibility. Take time to cool off, and then calmly tell them about your disappointment, anger, or frustration. (Your feelings can be a very powerful motivator for them.) And in the end, remember your agreement — only enforce the consequences you talked about, no surprises. When things are going well — which will be most of the time — be sure to tell them you noticed. Everyone likes a pat on the back, a word of thanks, or a compliment. Who knows? They might do the same for you some day.

Parenting Power Tips:

- Plan ahead—what do you want to accomplish in this conversation? Make notes for yourself using the DESK model.
- Communicate genuinely with your teen. You will accomplish more when they sense you're sincere.
- State the "D" and "E" portions of the DESK model and your perceptions of how your teen is being affected and what the potential consequences will be if the behavior does not change.
- Find out what your teen thinks about the information provided.
- State the "S" portion of DESK—offer suggestions for change and ways you plan to help that change take place.
- Review the "K"—know and remember your agreement about consequences—only enforce the consequences you talked about without any additional consequences added to surprise your child
- Build in follow-up. Plan a specific time to talk about progress.
- Give your teen an opportunity to improve.
- If the problem continues or deteriorates, seek help. [The Parent Resource Page](#) to find local resources.