



PARENTS USE YOUR POWER

March 2017

86%
respect their
friend's choice
to be
marijuana-free

(30 day data)

FACTS & STATS

FAQ's

RESOURCES

PREVENTION
EDUCATION
INTERVENTION
TREATMENT
RECOVERY

Conversation Starter of the Month—
“Tell me one thing that is really important to you.”

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Helping Your Teen Become More Independent

Becoming autonomous is a broader term which refers to teens becoming independent of their parent (and others) emotionally, in decision making, and in developing their own principles and beliefs. We could sum up autonomy by saying the teen feels, acts and thinks independently.

Healthy Development: Teens are undergoing changes in thinking and cognitive processes. Cognition can be viewed as the thought processes occurring within the brain. There are three basic areas where teens' thinking has grown during childhood: reasoning skills, abstract thinking, and the ability to “think about thinking.” Reasoning skills include an improved ability to think about options, to challenge long held ideas, and to consider possibilities. Abstract thinking skills include the ability to think about things such as emotions and what they mean or even academic concepts such as mathematical equations. Lastly, to “think about thinking” means the ability to step outside oneself and consider one's thoughts and what others might be thinking.

Teens may use these advanced thinking skills to challenge parents in order to test out and explore new ideas. Teens need help learning to express their ideas and challenge others in appropriate ways. Their expression of new ideas is part of normal development and shouldn't be viewed as defiant behavior. The exception might be if the challenges are frequent, disrespectful and are accompanied by acting out or problem behaviors. [If this is the case, and you feel your teen needs more help than you know how to give, seek professional guidance.](#)

Inconsistent Application of Skills: Even though teens might be better able to think about a situation and develop logical options, they may still have trouble thinking through problems and carrying out appropriate decisions in daily life. This is because overall brain functions are still not mature,

Staying Connected: Parents often take becoming independent to mean that their teen must “separate” from them and give in to peer influence. A more realistic, healthy and developmentally appropriate way to view autonomy is to see it as the parent and the teen figuring out together a new relationship which is based on the teen becoming more mature. It means that teens still stay connected to their parents (but in different ways) and allowing parents and teens to learn to relate to each other in new ways.

It is true that peers may seem to have more influence on some issues than parents, but parents still have a great deal of influence. It is detachment from parents, rather than attachment to peers, that is potentially harmful. Your teens need your input and support.

It's all about bidirectional respect in the relationship between teen and parents and focusing the teen's attention on who they really want to be, and how consistent they are being in expressing that in their daily life. Allow room for mistakes and learn from them.

Parent Tips:

- ◇ [Discuss issues and ideas with your teen.](#) Encourage their thinking but don't criticize ideas you may question. Ask them how they came to their conclusions. Encourage them to think through options.
- ◇ Model respect in your discussions with teens. Modeling goes a long way to encourage respectful conversations and behaviors.
- ◇ Admit your mistakes and how you learned from them.
- ◇ Help teens seek out individual strengths and talents.
- ◇ Ask teens to take on added responsibilities in the home based on their strengths and talents. For example, once they get their driver's license they can run some of the errands. They can do their own laundry or make dinner once a week.
- ◇ Consider relaxing the rules as your teen shows they are increasingly responsible. An example might be a later curfew on weekends.
- ◇ [Commit to each other's safety.](#) Negotiate boundaries and rules where everyone wins. Letting each other know where you're going, with whom and when you'll be home is a matter of consideration for those who care about you.
- ◇ Allow your teen to accept the consequences of their behavior. Don't swoop in and “fix” their mistakes.

Source: April 2016 survey of 11,774 District 203 and 204 High School students. A project of 360 Youth Services, Naperville School District 203, Indian Prairie School District 204, Naperville Police Department, KidsMatter and District 203 & 204 parents. Funding in whole or in part by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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