

Parent Power Grades 9-12

A Major Ingredient in the Recipe for Education Success

Teens need to know that their parents care about them. They need to learn how to make grown-up decisions – to decide about careers, to make personal value judgments, to learn how to get along on jobs, to manage households and to set appropriate boundaries for themselves once they leave home. To learn these skills, students need practice – practice they can and should get at home.

The Problem-Solving Habit

Even teenagers can get used to sizing up a problem and coming up with commonsense ways to solve it. Here's a six-step method that works and can be used easily at home by parents and teens.

STEP 1:

What is the problem?

This is a first, often overlooked, step in problem solving. You have to be able to state or define the problem and, if there's a conflict, the opposing views and feelings about the issue. For example: for a teen, it might be whether to go to a certain party; for a parent, whether to ask for a raise.

STEP 2:

What can be done about it?

This is when you come up with a variety of solutions. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible without judging which ones are better than others. Just keep the ideas coming.

STEP 3:

What are the good and bad points of these solutions?

This is when you evaluate the different solutions. What are the pros and cons of each one? You're making judgments, assessing the possible solutions in light of your experience and the way the world works. In this process you may well come up with a new and better solution than any you originally considered.

STEP 4:

Making the decision

This is the moment you choose a solution to try. Know that every decision has a consequence. Pick one or perhaps two based on the decisions made in Step 3. Reflect on why the particular solutions were chosen.

STEP 5:

Putting the decision into action

Now you put your decision to the test. In advance, talk about what will happen and what might be expected. What obstacles can you anticipate? What "helps" can you expect? How can traps be avoided by building on the helps?

STEP 6:

How did it go?

This is the follow-up, the evaluation of your decision and what followed from it. How did it work? What changes must be made to the solution so that it will work better?

What would you try next time? It's possible that a decision that sounded good will not work as well in real life. But, overall, there is a greater chance for success when decisions and solutions are selected based upon this step-by-step process.

After going through the process with one problem, ask your teenager to try another. Review the six steps so that everyone will be able to keep on using them in the future. The goal is to help teens get into the habit of this kind of rational problem solving.

The Problem 'Bank'

Just in case you don't have enough problems of your own to solve, here are a few you can use to practice the six-step problem-solving method:

- Who gets to use the car?
- Why is it bad to smoke?
- Why is it wrong to drink and drive?
- What happens when I go for a few days with little sleep?
- How much TV, Internet surfing or video-game playing are we going to do?
- Can I buy a new pair of jeans?
- Whose turn is it to go grocery shopping?
- Who has to baby-sit the younger sibling?
- When is a good time to visit grandma?
- What happens when I take a test without studying for it?
- Why can't I go to a party with no adults present?

Feelings Are Important

Start talking about how family members feel. Here's a KNOW YOURSELF activity: Think together about what makes people angry. Everyone gets angry for different reasons. Some people get angry when others take something from them; others get angry when people don't listen. Ask yourselves: What do we do when we get angry? Some people try to cool off before they speak. Others start fights. Some people scream. Some people don't say anything. What do you do?

Caring about others is another area where teens can often use help. Talk together about the challenges of being a parent/guardian and the challenges of being a student. Think about a recent situation in which you disagreed with each other. Exchange places: the guardian is the adolescent, the adolescent the guardian. Afterward, talk about it. Do you understand each other better now? What would you do differently if the situation presents itself in the future?

Educating Our Children,
Engaging Our Parents, Empowering Our Schools

