

# Promoting Parent-Teen Connectedness and Authoritative Parenting

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## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PARENTS TO PROMOTE AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING

- [Educate parents on the benefits of authoritative parenting](#)
- [Teach parents about open communication skills and active listening](#)
- [Encourage parents to be responsive to their teens' emotional and mental health needs](#)
- [Encourage parents to be involved in their teens' lives and find opportunities to connect regularly](#)
- [Teach parents to set clear and consistent expectations for their teens](#)
- [Help parents support youth independence](#)
- [Provide resources and support for parents who are struggling with parenting issues](#)

Healthy parent–teen communication and a close connection between teens and their parents, guardians, and other caregivers promote abstinence, contraceptive use, condom use, and other behaviors to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Commendador, 2010; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2012; Hutchinson et al., 2003; L'Engle et al., 2006; Markham et al., 2010; Miller et al., 1998; Widman et al., 2016). They have also been shown to protect teens from a host of other risky behaviors (Donaldson et al., 2016; Mahabee-Gittens et al., 2013). Studies show teens value their parents'/guardians' opinions when making serious decisions; however, when they think their parents do not care or when they have difficulty talking to their parents about their problems, teens are more likely to have compromised behavioral and emotional health (Ackard et al., 2006).

As a youth-serving provider, it is important to understand the impact of parenting styles on the development and behavior of youth so you can help parents establish the kind of relationship with their adolescents that protects against risk and promotes a healthy transition to adulthood. One parenting style, which has been extensively studied in the context of adolescent risk behaviors, is “authoritative parenting” (or “balanced parenting”). This tip sheet will define and describe authoritative parenting, contrast it with other parenting styles, and provide tips for promoting authoritative parenting among the parents of youth you serve.

In the interest of brevity, we are using “parents” to refer to “parents and other caregivers” for the remainder of this document. However, when working with parents of the youth you serve, it is important to be inclusive of all types of caregivers and guardians, such as an adolescents' grandparents or other relatives.

## WHAT IS AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING?

Researchers have defined four main parenting styles differentiated by their levels of responsiveness (warmth and supportiveness) and demandingness (rules and firm expectations for mature behavior) (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

**Authoritative parenting** is a parenting style characterized by *high* levels of *responsiveness* combined with *high* levels of *demandingness* (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Authoritative parents provide their children with emotional support and are attentive to their needs. They are significantly involved in their children's lives and set clear limits and boundaries for their behavior. Authoritative parents have open communication with their children and explain the reasons behind their rules and expectations. For example, an authoritative parent may set a curfew for their teen but will also explain the reasoning behind the curfew and allow their teen to share their perspective about it. Authoritative parents allow their children to make mistakes and express their opinions. They help their children solve problems and teach them to make decisions for themselves. They encourage their children to progressively gain autonomy and independence as they mature. Researchers have shown authoritative parenting is associated with a variety of positive outcomes among youth, including academic achievement, social competence, emotional health, and reduced levels of risk-taking behavior, including reduced rates of sexual risk behaviors (Akelson et al., 2012; Grossman, 2020; Hoskins, 2014; Lamborn et al., 2000; Luycyx et al., 2011; Marshal & Chassin, 2000; Pinquart, 2017; Pinquart & Kauser, 2018; Simons-Morton et al., 2001; Steinberg, 2001; Wilson, 2008).



In contrast, **authoritarian parenting** is characterized by *low* levels of *responsiveness* combined with *high* levels of *demandingness* (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Authoritarian parents expect their children to obey rules without question and typically do not explain the reasons for their rules. They may withdraw their affection as a punishment for misbehavior. They are less likely to encourage independence than authoritative parents. Children of authoritarian parents may have difficulty making decisions on their own.

**Permissive parenting** is characterized by *high* levels of *responsiveness* combined with *low* levels of *demandingness* (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Permissive parents do not tend to set limits or have clear expectations for their children and inconsistently enforce rules. Children of permissive parents may struggle with self-regulation.

Finally, **neglectful parenting** is characterized by *low* levels of *responsiveness* combined with *low* levels of *demandingness* (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Neglectful parents are uninvolved in their children's lives and provide little to no support or boundaries.

### The Four Parenting Styles

LEVEL OF RESPONSIVENESS/ DEMANDINGNESS	LOW DEMANDINGNESS Rules and Expectations	HIGH DEMANDINGNESS Rules and Expectations
HIGH RESPONSIVENESS Warmth and Support	PERMISSIVE	AUTHORITATIVE
LOW RESPONSIVENESS Warmth and Support	NEGLECTFUL	AUTHORITARIAN

## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PARENTS TO PROMOTE AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING

By sharing information about authoritative parenting with parents of the youth you serve, you have an opportunity to extend your influence to the home environment. Below you will find tips on educating parents about this topic and sample messages and resources you can share with parents in person, via text message, or on your program's social media channels.

### 1. Educate parents on the benefits of authoritative parenting.

Share research with parents to show how teens who remain close with their parents are more likely to stay away from risky behaviors, be more self-reliant, stay engaged at school, and respect their parents' guidance. Explain how teens are more likely to stop and think about how their parents expect them to behave when they have a strong connection with their parents.

*Messages to share with parents:*



Want to raise confident and responsible teenagers? Try [authoritative parenting](#)! Set clear boundaries, provide emotional support and foster independence!

Do you want to help your teen avoid risky behaviors like early sexual activity and drug and alcohol use? [Learn about authoritative parenting](#)!

Did you know parenting that combines warmth and limits has been found to protect teens from taking unhealthy risks? Learn how to have a [balanced parenting style](#)!

Want to help your teen learn self-control and be less susceptible to peer pressure? Discover the [benefits of authoritative parenting](#)!

Research shows authoritative parenting can reduce risky behaviors among teens. Learn about [this effective parenting style](#)!

## 2. Teach parents about open communication skills and active listening.

One of the key elements of authoritative parenting is being open to hearing what children have to say. Encourage parents to ask open questions and listen patiently without interrupting or thinking about what they are going to say next. Open questions begin with words like “what,” “how,” or “who,” unlike questions that could have a simple “yes” or “no” answer. Parents should also practice using “I messages”—beginning what they say with “I”—to model how to focus on one’s own feelings and experiences. Open communication is key to building a strong relationship with teens.

*Messages to share with parents:*

Listening can be more important than talking. Listen to your teen’s concerns and repeat what you hear.

Keep the lines of communication open with your teen. Learn how to have [effective communication](#).

Teens really **DO** want to know what parents think. Let your child know you’re always ready to talk about any topic!



## 3. Encourage parents to be responsive to their teens’ emotional and mental health needs.

Teens today are under a lot of pressure. They are undergoing emotional and physical changes associated with puberty and often feel significant stress and pressure related to school, jobs, extracurricular activities, and peer relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these pressures. Parents can make a huge difference by letting teens know they have a parent’s unconditional love and support. Parents should take the time to check in regularly with their teens and encourage them to communicate what they are feeling. Parents should also remember to let teens know they are appreciated and that they are proud of them.

*Messages to share with parents:*



Did you ask your teen how they are feeling today? It’s important to acknowledge your teen’s emotions and show them you care.

Let your teen know you appreciate them and accept them for who they are. Remember to thank them when they do something nice for you or others.

Catch your teen doing well! [Praise them for a job well done](#) and recognize the effort they put into reaching their goals.

#### 4. Encourage parents to be involved in their teens' lives and find opportunities to connect regularly.

It's important for parents to know their teens will tend to seek more independence as they mature, but they also still want and need a close relationship with their parents. Parents should not interpret normal behavioral changes during adolescence as a desire to disconnect. Research shows teens want to hear what their parents have to say about important topics like sex and relationships (Holman & Kellas, 2018). Encourage parents to take some time every day to give their teens their full attention, even if it's just a few minutes. Encourage them to plan one-on-one activities with their teens. The bonds built during fun times make it easier to have serious talks when those are needed. Family meals and meal preparation are great times to connect. Even spending time doing chores together can provide opportunities for relaxed conversations. For parents who have the time, getting involved in a teen's school activities can also foster closeness.

*Messages to share with parents:*

Mealtimes are great opportunities to stay connected with your teen! Involve your teen in preparing a meal and use the time as a chance to talk.

Plan one-on-one time with your teen each week to do something just with them.



#### 5. Teach parents to set clear and consistent expectations for their teens.

Parents should be clear about their rules so their teens know what is expected of them, and parents should explain the reasons behind their rules. Teens should be expected to follow family rules even when parents are not around. When you talk with parents, emphasize the importance of enforcing consistent rules, monitoring teens' behaviors, and using logical consequences when behavior is not acceptable. You can also encourage parents to help their teens set goals and make a plan to achieve their goals.

*Messages to share with parents:*

High expectations can help your teen achieve their goals! Encourage your teen to create a plan to achieve their dreams. They can use [these goal-setting resources from the We Think Twice campaign!](#)

[Explain the reasons for your rules and expectations.](#) Teens are more likely to follow your rules when they understand your reasons. They need to know your limits are designed to keep them safe and not just to control them.

Rather than giving your teen a punishment that is unrelated to what they did, create logical consequences connected to their behavior. You can also remind them that there are natural consequences of making mistakes. They'll learn to think ahead about the consequences of their behavior.



## 6. Help parents support youth independence.

Seeking independence is a normal part of growing up and is necessary for teens to become competent young adults. Parents will need to strike a balance between monitoring and guiding their teens and encouraging independence. By gradually giving teens a chance to make some decisions for themselves, parents let teens know they trust them to make responsible choices. Teens who feel respected and are allowed some say in what is expected of them will want to hold on to their parents' respect and may be more likely to follow their parents' rules.

*Messages to share with parents:*

When it comes to raising a teen, sometimes you have to pick your battles. As long as your teen is following your big rules and not jeopardizing their health or safety or making a decision with long-term, negative consequences, it's important to give them some space to make smaller decisions—like wardrobe choices, hair styles, or how to organize their room.

[Encourage your teen's independence!](#) Let your teen know they will earn more privileges and independence when they behave responsibly.



## 7. Provide resources and support for parents who are struggling with parenting issues.

It's important to be empathetic and understand that all parents struggle at times. Let parents know you are available for questions and collect resources about a variety of topics you can share with parents.

*Messages to share with parents:*



Parenting can be tough. All children have different needs. Remember: YOU are the expert on your children!

You've got this! No parent is perfect; the most important thing is to do your best, pay attention to what works and what doesn't, and keep trying.

Don't forget to [practice self-care](#) and recharge. You'll have more energy, and your kids will benefit.

Parenting can be challenging, but help is available. The [National Parent Helpline](#) has your back. Get support and resources from trained parent advocates!

## RESOURCES

Learn more about parent–teen communication, effective parenting practices, and how to engage parents in your programming. The more you know, the more support you can provide to the parents you serve.

### ***Resources on The Exchange***

#### [Parent-Child Communication](#)

This tip sheet provides quick facts about parent–child communication.

#### [Talking with Teens About Relationships and Sex](#)

This parent-focused infographic will help parents and caregivers start conversations with their teens about relationships and sex.

#### [Supporting Positive Engagement Among Young Fathers and their Children](#)

This webinar discusses how you can build supports for and knock down barriers to positive father–child engagement.

#### [Adulthood Preparation Subjects Resource Guide](#)

This resource guide contains a section on parent–child communication.

#### [Innovative Strategies for Adulthood Preparation Subjects: Adolescent Development, Healthy Relationships, & Parent-Child Communication](#)

This webinar focused on three Adulthood Preparation Subject topics—Adolescent Development, Healthy Relationships, and Parent–Child Communication—and specific activities and topics to consider when integrating each Adulthood Preparation Subjects into programming.

#### [Building on the Strengths of Young People: A Relationship-Focused, Trauma-Sensitive Approach](#)

This webinar offers practical strategies for adults, including parents and caregivers, to approach their relationships with youth to realize the power of relationships to heal and protect youth.

#### [Working with Parents of Teens](#)

This tip sheet describes types of parent involvement and provides examples for how program providers can engage parents.

#### [Toolkit for Engaging Parents and Caregivers in Optimal Health Programming](#)

This toolkit will help you identify strategies your organization may use to engage parents. It includes planning tips and assessment questions to help your organization get started with this type of engagement and specific activities you may consider.

### ***Additional Resources***

[Talking With Teens](#): Resources from the Center for Parent and Teen communication, including techniques, tips, and tricks for effective communication. Talking with Teens includes the following:

- [Parenting When You Want To Explode](#): Discusses what parents should and should not do to help children learn from their mistakes.
- [Communicating Love Clearly to Teens](#): Provides examples of the many ways parents can meaningfully demonstrate love for their children.
- [7 Expert Tips for Talking with Teens](#): Discusses how to control reactions, be a good listener, and offer constructive feedback

[Parenting That Works](#): A guide from the Center for Parent and Teen Communication about raising emotionally healthy, academically successful children who will make wiser behavioral decisions.

[Discipline and Monitoring](#): Resources from the Center for Parent and Teen Communication about setting rules and monitoring teen behavior.

[Parents' Self Care](#): Information for parents on practicing self-care from the Center for Parent and Teen Communication.

[Positive Parenting Tips](#): Information from the CDC about child development, positive parenting, safety, and health at each stage of a child's life.

[Parent Monitoring](#): Information from the CDC about effective monitoring practices for teens.

[Don't Forget the Families: The Missing Piece in America's Effort to Help All Children Succeed](#): Report from The Search Institute on developmental relationships, including relationship-building tips and activities.

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