

# Marriage & Family

## Fatherhood in Adolescence

1. Understanding: One of the most important ways to connect with your adolescent is to understand the teen's world. Adolescence is a time of change and transition, in almost every aspect of life.
  - a. Social.
    - Friends play a much more important role in the life of your adolescent that they once did.
    - Adolescents look to their peers for social norms, such as fashion, music, hair styles, and activities. But they still look to you for values and moral behavior.
  - b. Psychological.
    - Adolescents undergo changes as they strive to move from independence to interdependence.
    - They generally push for more independence than parents are willing to give. The goal of this push is to eventually be able to function on their own.
  - c. Physical and sexual maturation.
    - Puberty involves several changes, including rapid acceleration in growth, development of sex glands and secondary sexual characteristics, and changes in body composition.
    - These changes affect the way adolescents view themselves. Adolescence is one of the fastest periods of growth in a person's life, second only to infancy. Puberty may be a difficult subject to discuss, especially for fathers and daughters.
  - d. Thinking.
    - Adolescents make great leaps in their ability to think.
    - They are better able than children to think about possibilities and abstract ideas, such as hypothetical situations and future goals.
    - In addition, adolescents for the first time are able to ponder on the process of thinking itself. This makes adolescents better arguers than ever before.
2. Support: Parental support is one of the most important contributions you can make to your adolescent's development. The greater the parent's support, the greater the adolescent's social competence (self-esteem, moral behavior, academic achievement).
  - a. Affection.
    - Don't assume your teenager does not want to be hugged. Ask him or her what is comfortable and continue to express your love, through your words, tone of voice, and body language.
    - Don't assume your kids know how much you love them—tell them!
  - b. Companionship.

- The fun things you used to do with your child may be embarrassing to him/her as a teen (specifically if it is in public). But this does not mean your teen doesn't want to spend time with you.
  - Spending one-on-one time with your adolescent can be a wonderful way to stay connected.
    - Do some special activities—go shopping, play a board game, take a walk.
    - Ask your teen what he/she enjoys doing with you, and then set a time to do it together. This can take the whole day or just ten minutes after school.
    - If your teen's active schedule doesn't fit yours, maybe you need to fit into your teens.
  - c. Contact.
    - Your son or daughters needs you to be there for him/her. Your consistent presence in their lives is an important part of their security.
    - Fathers are important in routine daily living—building patterns, traditions, and memories.
    - But you should also be aware of events that are out of the routine—recitals, big games, tough classes, romances, breakups, fears, hopes, and dreams.
    - It may be challenging to balance work with fathering roles. If you can't be physically present at your teen's event, give him/her a call before and after just to let your teen know he/she is on your mind.
3. Communication.
- a. While there is usually room for a well-timed lecture, your adolescent needs you just to listen.
  - b. Quite often, adolescents don't need answers or advice, and they don't need you to think about what you'll say next while they are talking.
    - Adolescents are comforted by knowing you're there to listen.
    - Seek first to understand, whether you're resolving a conflict, offering comfort and counsel, or just talking at the dinner table.
    - Let them know you value their opinion, even if it's different from yours.

Shannon L. Sachs-Carter, "Fathering Your Adolescent: Ways to Strengthen Your Relationship," Ohio State University Extension, HYG-5298-98.