

Setting limits with young people

Young people are developing the skills to become independent. They have a strong need to feel in charge of their own lives. This is a normal part of the move towards adulthood. While it may signal a change in their parenting needs, your role remains as important as ever. This includes having clear expectations that help keep your young person safe and support their wellbeing. Involving them in setting limits helps build their problem solving skills and encourages cooperation. It's a great opportunity to stay closely connected and positively influence their growing maturity.

Adolescence

The preteen and teenage years are a time of rapid and significant change in young people's bodies, thinking and emotions – see Parent Easy Guides 'Adolescent development' and 'Guiding and supporting young people'.

Setting limits

It's normal for young people to seek greater freedom and new experiences and become more involved in decisions that affect them. It's also important for parents to have clear expectations



that help them manage risk-taking behaviours and support their wellbeing. Having open conversations can help you explore options together and come to shared agreements. This helps keep your relationship strong and can be a win-win.

You could agree on:

- how they will keep safe when out or online
- whether girlfriends or boyfriends can sleep over
- the use of alcohol and drugs
- attending or hosting parties
- what is negotiable and what is not.

It helps to make agreements when things are calm and to give your young person a chance to practise what you expect.

Keeping your relationship strong and good communication are key to supporting your young person.



If agreed expectations are not met

At times young people may push limits and not meet expectations, even if they have agreed to do so.

- Stay calm, even if you feel frustrated or upset.
- Remember their brain is still developing.
- Listen to your young person's reasons for not doing what they agreed. This helps them take responsibility for their actions. You are helping them learn skills and how to work out solutions.
- Ask what they think could help next time.
- Come up with a new agreement.

Be loving, firm and consistent as young people develop skills and learn responsibility.

This may take time.



If there is conflict

Arguments and conflict can happen in families when young people start to express their own views and values and challenge limits and authority. Try not to take it personally.

You could:

- agree about respectful ways to have difficult conversations before problems arise
- be curious about the cause of the conflict, eg 'What makes you think that way about this issue?'
- avoid getting into a power struggle.

While difficult conversations can be stressful, both parties need to feel safe. No form of violence – physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, financial – is ever OK. (See Parent Easy Guides 'Family violence' and 'Violence towards parents'.)

When done respectfully, hard conversations can help bring you closer and strengthen your young person's skills.

Seeking help

If you have any concerns about your young person's wellbeing act early to get help, eg trusted family, friends, your GP, a youth service.

Your health and wellbeing are important too.

Taking time for yourself can help make parenting easier. Young people will see you respect and value yourself.

When young people feel listened to and that they have a say, they are more likely to work out ways to cooperate and meet expectations.



Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people.

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