

## Introduction

### Parenting Value from the U.S. Gov't Office of Adolescent Development: Healthy Parent-Child Relationships

The relationship between children and their parents or caregivers (such as guardians, aunts and uncles, or grandparents) is one of the most important relationships in a child's life, often lasting well into adulthood. In adolescence, this relationship changes dramatically as youth seek increased independence from their families and begin to make their own decisions. With increased independence comes the possibility of increased risk, both positive and negative, and teens need parents or caregivers to help them navigate the challenges that adolescence presents. Though some amount of conflict between adolescents and their parents is normal,<sup>1,2</sup> adolescents still rely on parents or caregivers to provide emotional support and set limits, both of which are linked to positive adolescent development.<sup>3,4</sup>

Just as close parent-child relationships are linked to the healthy development of adolescents,<sup>5</sup> positive parenting behaviors are linked to increased parent-child closeness. There are many positive parenting techniques for parents who want to build stronger parent-child relationships. These tips also can be used by siblings, other family members, and other caring adults who are influential figures in adolescents' lives.

### The Importance of Parental Figures in the Lives of Adolescents

Parenting an adolescent is different than parenting a younger child. [Peers become increasingly important in the lives of adolescents](#) and influence their appearance (e.g., clothing), certain behaviors (e.g., language use and taste in music), and social life (e.g., dating). However, parents still play a large and vital role; they help shape adolescents' educational plans, their moral and social values, and their broader world view.<sup>2</sup>

As children grow, parenting shifts from making decisions for the younger child to helping older children and adolescents make decisions on their own, while minimizing the chance that they engage in high risk behavior. Parents can provide needed support and affection and help adolescents understand how their choices can affect their health and well-being.<sup>6</sup> In fact, research shows that parents continue to have more influence than peers on many important outcomes, including whether adolescents smoke, use alcohol or other drugs, or have sex.<sup>7</sup>

Developing and maintaining a positive and strong parent-adolescent relationship has real consequences. Positive parent-child relationships are associated with higher levels of adolescent self-esteem, happiness, and life satisfaction, and lower levels of emotional and physical distress. Close parent-child relationships also have been linked to safer sex behaviors among adolescents and lower use of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana.<sup>8</sup>

*Discussion Questions: Even if a government office like the one above is stating the importance of parents in the lives of their children, how much of this is being said and promoted publicly? Do you hear politicians often addressing this as a major factor in keeping America strong? What factors might be keeping the importance of parenting and grandparenting at a minimum? What do you think a representative from this office would say to parents if that person were to address a parents' group in person?*