

Got A Minute? Give It to Your Kid

Getting more involved with your preteen today will help you stay connected tomorrow. Not only that, it will help your child make better decisions, even about things like smoking or drinking. It's not always easy. And we know there's not always time.

Tactics other parents have used to stay involved in their child's life:

Prove you're listening: Ask questions.

Pretending to listen is easy. Really listening is tougher. You have to pay attention and ask follow-up questions. If you rarely listen to your child when he or she wants to talk, your child will be less likely to open up when you really want to connect.

Create rules, and then enforce them.

Rules are the boundaries that every kid needs. Say yes when you can, but make no stick. Only the rules you enforce will matter. Don't set rules you do not intend to enforce. That will only create confusion.

Regularly share a meal with your preteen.

Not everybody has the luxury of eating a regular meal with his or her child. If you do, take advantage of it; teens that report eating meals with their family are less likely to smoke or use drugs. It will encourage each of you to catch up with the other.

Write your child a thank-you note. Some preteens say one of the reasons they know their parents care is because they get thank-you notes left at the dinner table, stuck in a book, or slipped under a pillow. You don't need to thank your child for anything really big. It can be for setting the table, helping a friend, or saying something nice.

Give your preteen family responsibilities. Assign your preteen a chore that helps the whole family, like organizing your home recycling effort or caring for the dog. By giving your child responsibilities you are implicitly saying you trust his or her competence and are allowing them to feel more "adult" -the same benefit cigarettes or alcohol falsely offer teens.

From: The BAY Team! Barrington's Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force