

A guide to parenting your teen



Being the parent of a teenager is both exciting and challenging! As teenagers develop and prepare to join the adult world, they become less attached to their parents and increasingly self-reliant. On their way to becoming responsible grown-ups, they must learn to form their own opinions and ideas. At the same time, this is an emotionally turbulent period that can leave youngsters feeling vulnerable.

The teenage years represent a period of great change. The job of the adults is to be there when their teenager needs a safe harbour, someone to talk to, someone they can test their new-found opinions and ideas out on, and someone who can set boundaries firmly, yet kindly. More than ever, your teenager needs you to be there when it matters, to provide support and respectful guidance, and show that you care about and love them regardless of what may happen.

Social media are important arenas where young people can express their identities, but they can also lead to social pressure and unhealthy comparison with others. In the same way, your teen's friends become more important to them. As parents, we must accept that we do not have the same level of influence as we had before.

In general, the teenage period brings many joys, but it can also be challenging for the youngster concerned and for you as their parent. As parents, we often have to cope with rejection and arguments. We may become unsure about how to handle such situations. We become fearful about what our teens are going through, and we grow tired of standing firm in the face of constant battles. In that case, it can be beneficial to share your experiences with other parents of teens! Welcome to this guide to parenting your teen!

This parenting programme is based on eight group meetings:

- Meeting 1: **Identity and belonging**
- Meeting 2: **Understanding your teen's emotions**
- Meeting 3: **Seize opportunities for contact**
- Meeting 4: **Meet your teen on their terms**
- Meeting 5: **Get to know who you are as a parent**
- Meeting 6: **Regulate feelings, cope with rejection and mend fences**
- Meeting 7: **Negotiation, planning and boundary-setting**
- Meeting 8: **Final thoughts**

What you can expect from this parenting programme

Group meetings provide an opportunity to discuss and share experiences and thoughts. You will be given specific exercises to do during the group sessions and at home. The topics we will address concern the changes your child undergoes during adolescence and how these changes affect your role as a parent. What can you expect as the parent or carer of a teen? What is good to know, and how can you help your teen to develop and become a healthy, independent person, while taking care of yourself along the way?

Understanding how to respond to the feelings of children, adolescents and older teenagers is often the main topic for many parenting classes. Adolescence often marks an explosion of new and different feelings. You may sometimes find it difficult to maintain good contact with your teen. Both youngsters and parents feel more stressed and anxious during this period. By taking this course, we hope you will develop a greater understanding of yourself and your teen.

Emotionally supportive parenting style

A parent who has what we call a “supportive parenting style” views feelings as an opportunity to connect with their teenager, an opportunity to show empathy and acceptance, and to validate their feelings. Validation means acknowledging, putting into words and accepting someone’s feelings as legitimate and worthwhile. Children and adolescents learn how to resolve and deal with difficult situations by watching the way their parents react to emotions. The objective of a supportive parenting style is to teach the growing child to trust and regulate their feelings, and to solve problems.

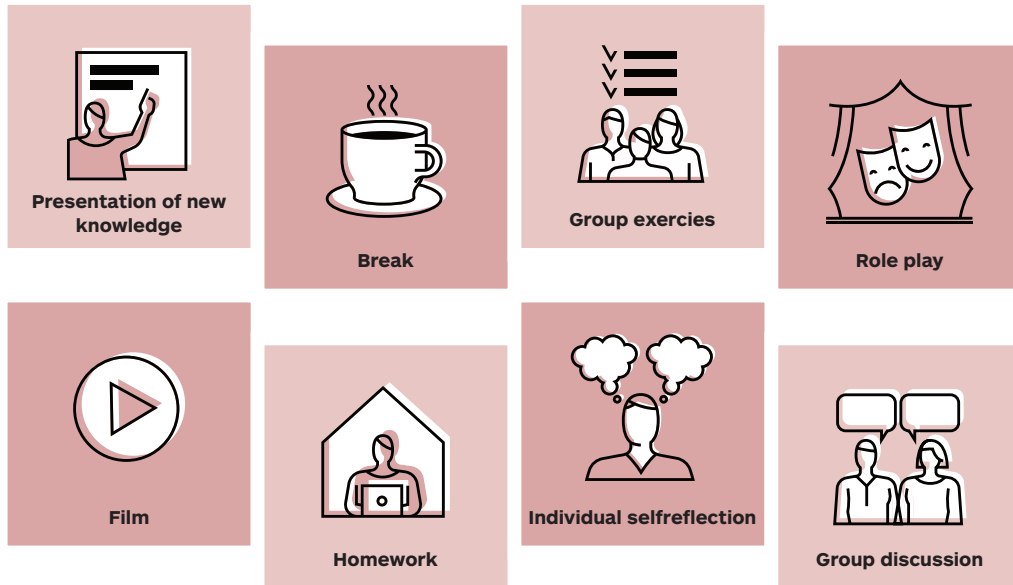
Parents with a supportive parenting style are aware and accepting. They respond to the feelings of others and manage both positive and negative emotions in a way that helps give their child or teenager a better understanding of and control over their own emotions (also called “emotional competence”).

Parents with a supportive parenting style are not only accepting and aware of their teen’s feelings, but also of their own.



About the group meetings

Each meeting will address a different topic, but all the meetings will contain the following elements:



Structure of group meetings

<p>Welcoming remarks and review of the homework</p>	<p>Each meeting starts with a quick review of the previous topic and thought sharing about the latest homework assignment. Each participant chooses what they wish to share.</p>
<p>Theory/knowledge concerning today's topic</p>	<p>The theory underpinning each topic is presented.</p>
<p>A variety of different exercises</p>	<p>Participants will engage in group exercises at each meeting. These will range from self-reflection or reflection in pairs, to exercises involving the group as a whole. The aim of the exercises is to draw out the participants' own thoughts and experiences, and perhaps provide new perspectives on their interactions with their teens.</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p>The meetings conclude with a look ahead to the next session's topic and a run through of the homework.</p>

Meeting 1

Identity and belonging

Today's goals

- To get to know each other and develop a degree of mutual trust.
- To get to know some of the changes that are happening to our teenagers.

The new parenting role

The teenage period nowadays is different to what it was in our youth. Social media and extensive screen use are new phenomena for today's teen parents. It can feel a very long time since we ourselves were that age. It is a period filled with emotions, both negative and positive, and it is easy to end up asking: "What happened to my sweet little kid?"

The parents' job is to be there when their teen needs them. Parents play many different roles, but must be a source of loving care, a safe harbour and a discussion partner, as well as someone who sets appropriate boundaries.

More than ever, your teenager needs you to be there when it matters, to provide support and respectful guidance, and show that you care about and love them regardless of what may happen. Having spent years acting as "general manager" or "chief executive" in their child's life, many parents find themselves abruptly fired when their child becomes a teen. It is safe to say that the best they can hope for then is to be rehired in the role of "consultant". However, the experience will vary from person to person. How has the parent role changed for you?

Homework:

What is your opinion of your teenager?

Everyone has positive and negative sides. When it comes to teenagers, it is easy to focus on the negative aspects: their moodiness, their insecurity, their refusal to take responsibility, their unhelpfulness, their constant complaining and their tendency to shut themselves up inside their rooms. Which positive aspects do you notice?



Meeting 2

Understanding teenage emotions

Mål for dagen

- To understand the changes that take place in the brains of teenagers.
- To identify the links between brain developments and their impact on teenage emotions.

Is acknowledging teenagers' feelings really that important? Isn't it just a matter of too many raging hormones?

When we are born, we are incapable of regulating our own emotions. We are 100 per cent dependent on help from our primary caregivers. As we grow and develop, including during our teenage years, we need quite a lot of help to identify what we are feeling and what we need to restore our emotional balance when we feel overwhelmed. In recent years, researchers have studied how people in families talk about and relate to feelings/emotions. The teenage period is a time when youngsters experience new or heightened emotions, and their parents' behaviour influences the emotional competence they acquire through childhood and adolescence. Youngsters with a high level of emotional competence seem to manage better at home and at school.

“Never mind, up you get!”

When toddlers fall and hurt themselves, we quickly bend down and say: “Never mind, up you get!” When our child or teenager is hurting, the vast majority of us will instinctively feel a desire to remove whatever is causing the pain, often by trying to divert their

attention away from the source of their discomfort. But to effectively regulate their feelings, the child/teen needs more strategies than simply diverting their attention away from what is hurting.

So if we adults do not have any strategies other than a well-meaning “Never mind...”, the child will learn that pain is not something they need to take seriously. Children rely primarily on their caregivers to teach them an adequate set of responses to pain, stress, rejection, loss and humiliation.

To raise robust children, who successfully master their emotions, the “Never mind, up you get!” strategy is not always the best. To understand and master an emotion, it must be acknowledged and validated. Throughout childhood and adolescence, it is the parents who are best positioned to help the child develop their emotional competence and learn about, recognise and manage a variety of different emotions. Validation means acknowledging, putting into words and accepting someone's feelings as legitimate and worthwhile. Children and adolescents learn how to resolve and deal with difficult situations by watching the way their parents react to emotions. Parents can help their child to develop their own emotional competence when they themselves know about, recognise and manage a variety of different emotions.

Homework

Think of a situation where you try to explore what your teenager is feeling. Be an “emotional detective” and try to notice and put into words what you discover.



Meeting 3

Seize opportunities for contact

Today's goals

To reflect on the quality of participants' interactions with their teenager – and what creates a connection for the teen.

Deep conversations

Teenagers may increasingly seek out people of their own age, but their parents are still important. The parental role and the connection parents have with their child change throughout the teenage period, but the youngsters' need for connection remains equally important. Teens challenge themselves, seek out new things and try to find their place and fit in with a peer group. In a world where teenagers must explore social codes, discover who they are and what they like, it is important that their parents continue to represent a safe harbour to come home to. That makes it easier for teenagers to experiment, make mistakes and withstand what the world throws at them as they transition into the realm of adulthood. We never grow out of the need for belonging and connection.

Maintaining a good connection with teenagers requires sensitivity and an understanding of what they need. When you are with your teen, you must try and understand how they are feeling, so that you can learn what they want, do, feel, are interested in and concerned about. In that way, your teen will feel that you care. Everyone needs to feel "seen" and "understood".

Sometimes, teenagers need you to keep your distance. In that case, participating in their activities or engaging in a shared project may be better than trying to talk about their innermost feelings. It is about giving them space to grow up.

If you are aiming to connect with your teen, you must try and talk to them and be positive. Even teenagers need to feel a close connection with their parents. The aim is to prevent your teen from feeling lonely, isolated and insecure.

By a "deep conversation", we mean a conversation in which we put into words and share our thoughts and feelings.

Checklist for good conversations:

- Physical proximity, close enough
- Eye contact
- Two-way conversation involving an exchange of thoughts and feelings
- Share feelings
- Right time and place
- Doing activities together can often be a good starting point for intimate conversations

Reflection exercise

We will now do a reflection exercise. We will think about when we talk to our teen and whether we have good conversations. From day-to-day, we have many conversations about subjects that do not necessarily generate deep emotional contact and intimacy. Many conversations with teenagers are limited to mundane questions and answers, such as "Where are you going?" or "Have you remembered your PE kit?"

To strengthen your emotional connection with your teenager, it is essential that you engage them in deep conversations.

- What happens when you have a deep conversation with a teen?
- Is there a difference between boys and girls? (Interesting to hear what teenagers themselves have to say – what do they think?)
- Give examples of how you achieve this in practice. What do you usually talk about?
- In which situations do you find you achieve the best connection with your teen?
- How does it feel not to succeed when you would like to make that connection?
- How does it make you feel when your teen thinks you are nagging or being clingy?
- How does it make you feel when your teen thinks you are being controlling?
- How do you react when your teen rejects you? Does it make you feel worried or angry?
- Can you remember a time when you wanted the support of your parents, and you did not get it? How would you have liked them to have responded to you?

Homework:

Notice the conversations you have with your teen. When do you have deep conversations? Write a note to yourself when you have had an emotionally deep conversation with your teen and bring it with you next time.

Meeting 4

Meet your teen on their terms

Today's goals

- To discover what an empathetic response is
- To reflect on the opportunities you have to show your teen empathy

An empathetic response is one where you see something from another person's point of view, and refrain from contradicting them (e.g. "It wasn't like that." or "That's not what I meant..."). You must truly acknowledge the other person's perspective as their genuine experience (without a "but" or a "you must be mistaken because..."). Try to understand the other person's feelings and communicate that you both acknowledge and validate their experience.

Showing empathy involves:

- Seeing things from someone else's perspective
- Not judging
- Understanding the feelings of others
- Expressing your understanding
- Being fully attentive

Reflection exercise

What does it feel like to be met with empathy?
What do you think about meeting your teen in this way?

In which situations is this natural?

When is it not useful to respond to your teen by mirroring their feelings and offering emotional guidance?

Note! Not all situations are suitable for emotional guidance. In many situations, teenagers need their parents to provide sound leadership rather than emotional guidance.

Homework

1. Be aware of your teenager's feelings, particularly if they are not outwardly expressed to any degree (such as moodiness, frustration or disappointment)
2. Consider any expression of feelings as an opportunity for connection and learning
3. Listen to and accept their feelings – do not judge
4. Show that you understand how the other person is feeling
5. If appropriate, help them to solve the problem – or set boundaries

Practise the five steps listed above. You can practise on the teenager you have at home. What happens during the conversation? Write down some thoughts about this conversation and bring these notes with you next time.



Meeting 5

Get to know who you are as a parent

Today's goals

- To learn about the different patterns of interaction between parents and teens
- Get to know who you are as a parent

The parental role and parenting styles

Compared with a couple of generations ago, much has changed in society today. This will also affect the way we parent. Young people are growing up in a society that is very different to the one our generation of parents experienced when we were young.

A growing body of knowledge about childhood and adolescence has helped to change how we behave as parents. Everyone is different, but today's parents do have some characteristics in common. Over time, parents have become gentler and less authoritarian. Research has shown that children and adolescents learn more, become more self-confident and develop in a positive way when the parenting style is warm and supportive rather than "hard" and authoritarian.

Researchers have seen that parents demonstrate some typical behaviours when dealing with children and adolescents. It is these patterns of interaction that we will discuss in today's group meeting.

Reflection exercise

When you were a child/teen, which feelings did you and your parents have in common? How did your parents treat you when you were a teen? Were you ever shouted at, punished or rejected? Can you remember how it felt?

Homework

Reflect on your own childhood experiences. Self-reflection as homework. If possible, share your experiences with your partner, a friend or someone else you feel comfortable confiding in.

- How did your parents show that they loved you?
- In what way did your parents set boundaries for you? And how did you react to this?
- How were you treated when you were sad or scared? Was it a good or a bad experience for you?
- How easy/difficult was it to show negative emotions (anger, sadness, shame, fear) in your family?
- What impact do you think your own childhood has had on your adult life in general, including your self-esteem and how you behave towards your teenager?



Meeting 6

Cope with rejection, regulate your own feelings and mend fences

Today's goals

- To reflect on your own feelings when engaging with your teenager
- To become more aware of your own patterns of thought and action (parenting style) in different situations

Coping with rejection

Many parents experience being rejected by their teenager. This is a natural part of the child's process of development towards adulthood. It is about becoming their own person, an independent individual. Rejection affects parents in different ways. Some parents feel hurt and upset, some become anxious and more controlling, some respond with tit-for-tat rejection, while others become resigned and passive, or simply refuse to engage with their teen's emotions at all.

Feelings often hurt more when we try to suppress them. So how can we regulate our feelings without suppressing them? A challenge for many parents is that they, during their own childhoods, have learnt to censor and suppress their reactions and feelings. It is only possible to regulate our own feelings if we get to know our true reactions. Today, we will be talking about the methods we parents can use to regulate our own feelings.

Emotional regulation means being able to recognise feelings, accept them without judgement and tolerate their presence without pushing them away or fiercely clinging to them. That is easier said than done. Even if we can understand that we are reacting stupidly or irrationally, it is terribly difficult to alter course, particularly when we are boiling inside.

Self-regulation

When they need to cool off, some people go for a walk, take a time-out, go training or engage in some kind of activity. There are many possibilities. The most important thing is that we find a way to calm down, so we can resume our contact or dialogue with our teenager. It is also important that we are able to relax if we find ourselves brooding, worrying or feeling anxious about our teenager, so that we do not become exhausted by our own concerns.

In what kinds of situations do you need to regulate your feelings, and how do you do it?

Mending fences

It is never too early or too late to mend fences. One way of doing so is to say sorry. When their parents say sorry and attempt to mend fences, teenagers learn by example that relations can be repaired if they have broken down. Teenagers can then transfer this knowledge and experience to their relationships with friends and other important people in their lives.

Apologising and taking full and unconditional responsibility helps to reduce feelings of guilt and shame on the part of both parents and teenager. It is, however, important to avoid adding a "but" to any apology. "I'm sorry, but..." does not feel like a full and unconditional apology. It will carry more weight if you simply say: "I'm really sorry that I..."

How do you mend fences? For an apology to succeed in mending fences, it must come from the heart. If you are not ready, take your time and think over what you want to say. Plan and examine your feelings. Planlegg og kjenn etter.

Homework

- Notice what happens inside when your teenager rejects you, does not listen to you, or does something else to cause friction. How do you react?
- How do you mend fences?

Meeting 7

Negotiation, planning and boundary-setting

Today's goals

To reflect on what boundary-setting is and how we as parents must adapt the way we set boundaries to support our teenager's development.

Setting boundaries

Teenagers need boundaries not only to stop them from making bad choices, but also because boundaries support emotional regulation. Sometimes, teenagers need us to be firm and clear. That is how we can help them navigate.

Teenagers are on a journey to becoming independent and able to manage for themselves. That is something we parents must respect. We may think that we have more experience and knowledge and make better decisions than our teenagers, but they will not necessarily listen if

they feel they are not being taken seriously and respected.

Your relationship with your teen is the most important factor in enabling you as a parent to set boundaries. When you feel it is necessary to set boundaries, it is wise to think through the situation, as well as what you want to say and why. It is not a good idea to set boundaries when you yourself are extremely upset, angry or scared.

Reflection exercise

- What makes you set boundaries for your teen?
- In what situations do you wish to set boundaries?
- Have you experienced any difficult situations in your own life that you want to protect your teen from?
- Do you remember how your parents set boundaries for you?

What challenges does your teen have to overcome, and what behaviours must they regulate?

Underlying requirements

Setting boundaries requires consistency on your part, an understanding of your teen's perspective, as well as a true dialogue between you.

Clear the way	Think through what you can do beforehand. For example, can you put out their PE kit? Can you charge their phone?
Make plans together	Make plans together with your teen. For example, what should they do if they miss the last bus home?
Offer tailored support	Adjust the amount of help and support you provide to address the needs of your teen as an individual. Think through whether your demands and expectations are realistic.
Negotiate boundaries	Be consistent, invite your teen to engage in a dialogue with you. Teenagers need to practise taking responsibility for themselves, so be prepared to listen to their point of view in addition to laying out your own.



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