



Teenagers and risky behaviour

Getting through the teenage years together



QUICK TIPS

Tips on talking with your teenager to keep them safe

Talking to your teen about taking risks

Having a teen in the family can be tough, they're not a child anymore and they're also not quite an adult. They may sometimes be moody or bad tempered, but they still need your love and support, even if they pretend they don't!

New experiences

It may be hard to stop your growing teen from taking risks or trying new experiences, especially when it's driven by peer pressure. It's best to talk to them about the risks involved in certain situations or behaviour as they begin to take steps towards becoming an adult. It may be stressful for you as a parent so make sure you are there for them and be ready to pick up the pieces if things fall apart.

Don't just make it a one-off conversation, keep communication open with your teen and talk to them about the risks they may face.

Things to talk about to keep your teenager safe:

Dating and relationships

- Have conversations on dating and intimacy. First love can be very intense so ask them how they feel and if they're being treated right.
- When they're in a relationship it may seem like puppy love at first, but things can quickly go the opposite way. Don't lecture your teen, support them through any challenge that appears.
- They may need help to see the bigger picture and that everything is not as perfect as it seems.
- How they want the relationship to develop may clash with your standards but give them leeway. Make sure they know about making their own decisions and saying no.
- The hardest things to talk about, but very important, is making your teen aware that pregnancy or catching an STI are risks to keep in mind. They shouldn't be pressured to do anything they don't want to, especially under the influence.
- Teens need to know to practise safe sex and use condoms. Condoms are most effective in preventing STIs.



Drinking

- It's worth talking to your teen about alcohol to prevent them from drinking or curb the amount they drink, especially if they're underage.
- Listen to your teen's thoughts on drinking and don't be judgmental. You may want to mention the long-term health risks or effects drinking can have.
- You should make sure they know their limits so not to throw up or do something embarrassing that they will regret later.
- If your teen goes out and you think there will be drinking, remind them no one should be drinking and driving. To get home they must call a taxi or agree that you will collect them.



Smoking or vaping

- Your teen may try their first cigarette or vape but let them know once they start it's hard to stop.
- They may think it's cool or have seen their family members or friends smoke but it's easier not to start at all.
- If your teen smokes, there is a lot of information and support available, there are teen support groups.
- Quitting will be hard but tell your teen not to give up, it's worth giving up to improve their health and wellbeing.

Drugs

- Ask your teen if they have been using drugs, don't panic, try and find out if they're just experimenting or have an addiction.
- If they have an addiction let them know you care and love them and support them to seek help.

Driving

- Your teen or their friends may have passed their driving test recently and got a car. Make sure they don't mess around when it comes to driving.
- Remind them to drive safely, wear their seatbelt, not to use a phone while driving and not to speed or show off for the thrill of it.
- If you think they're going to go out drinking, ensure they get a taxi home rather than drunk drive home.



Keeping safe online

- Your teen should know not to share inappropriate content, start sexting, be a cyberbully or to share private information with others.
- They should know that they shouldn't be made to do anything they don't want to do. Nor persuade others to give them inappropriate images.
- If you think someone is harassing or bullying your teen online, let your teen know they can report it on the site or app and seek support from an adult they trust.

Keeping your teenager safe

They may kick up a fuss about being old enough to look after themselves, but the truth is that teens don't always make the right choices and they know this as well as you do. Setting out some ground rules makes it clear that they're being looked after and despite the fuss that they make about being in charge of their own lives, the boundaries actually make them feel safe and secure.

Things you remember to keep your teenager safe:

Help them say 'no' to pressure

Point out that their friends might just be showing off. Help them see that they can have a mind of their own.

Make sure they are aware of the risks

Teens need to understand the risks surrounding the choices they make. It is not uncommon for young people get in trouble with the police because of things they do when they are drunk or on drugs. Talk to them about potential risks and making positive choices.

Positive messages help

Your behaviour will influence them most. Don't expect them not to drink and smoke if you drink and smoke in front of them.

Don't expect instant solutions

If they are displaying risky behaviour, it might be they are masking this behaviour and possibly struggling with other issues such as bullying, self-esteem, friends or relationships. Let them know you are there to listen and help. Avoid trying to solve everything with one conversation. Seek support from others such as your GP, the school, family and friends.

Be clear about what is and what isn't allowed in your house

Help them understand what your worries are too.

Not going out late alone

Knowing how they will get home, keeping in touch by their mobile and letting you or a friend know where they are going. Go through safety tips with them so they understand what to do if they are facing an uncomfortable or worrying situation.

Don't panic if you think your teen is using drugs or drinking

Wait until you are calm and let them know you are worried. Encourage them to tell you what's happening.



Summary

Let them know that you understand that the pressures teens face can be difficult.

Listen and talk openly to your teen about the risks and challenges they will come up against, this can help reduce the risks that they face in their day-to-day life.

Don't try to force a conversation. It's a good idea to keep an open mind and accept that talking about difficult issues might be tricky for you both.

Give them practical ways to help them stay safe so they don't have to learn through their mistakes.

Sometimes the best way to help your teen is to get help and support yourself. Don't be afraid to ask for it.

How we can help

Coram Family Lives is always here to support you through difficult times. For support call our **confidential helpline on 0808 800 2222**, send us a message on **WhatsApp on 07441 444125**, email us at **askus@familylives.org.uk** or chat to us online via our website **www.coramfamilylives.org.uk**.