



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

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Know! To Evaluate and Possibly Increase Your Child's Freedom and Independence this Summer

The fourth of July is almost here but talk of freedom and independence in your home may apply to more than just Independence Day. If your children are asking you to loosen the reins, you're not alone.

It's normal and healthy for adolescents to seek increased independence as they grow and develop. It's also normal for parents to have a hard time letting go. Naturally, we worry about our children's health safety, and their ability to make good decisions. However, for our children to become mature, responsible, and self-disciplined young people, we must allow them to make some decisions on their own, mistakes and all.

With that said, your freedom-seeking adolescent still needs your parental influence and the stability you provide. Problems occur when parents allow more freedom than a child is ready to handle or permit the wrong kind of freedom. Difficulties also arise when parents cling too tightly, not allowing children the freedom they need. Research tells us that children do best when they remain closely connected with their parents, yet are free to express their own thoughts and opinions.

The challenge for parents is in figuring out the right amount of freedom to give and when to give it.

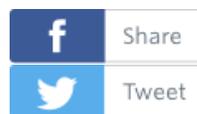
Consider these tips in helping with that challenge:

Grant Independence in Stages: While age is important in deciding when and how much freedom to give, maturity and past performance are also key factors. Start small, permitting your child to make a few decisions that don't entail major consequences. If done well, you may choose to increase your son or daughter's freedom further. Regardless, you will gain a better sense of your child's maturity level and decision-making skills.



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Prevention Action Alliance
6171 Huntley Road, Suite G

Set Clear Limits: Limits make children feel loved and more secure. They need and want to know what behavior is expected of them, especially as they are given additional freedoms. You don't want your child to assume that increased freedom on one thing equates to increased freedom on another. Therefore, boundaries must be set and clearly communicated to your child.

Columbus, Ohio 43229
PH: (614) 540-9985
FX: (614) 540-9990

Give Reasonable Choices: Reasonable choices make youth more open to guidance. For instance, instead of saying, "No, you can't go to the party," include options like, "You can't go to the party, but you can have your friends over or I can drop you and your friends off at the movies."

Guide Their Thinking: Adolescents are more responsive when they feel you are trying to guide, not control them. Talk with your child, listen carefully, and ask questions that encourage your child to think about how choices and actions have outcomes and consequences. .

Mistakes and Consequences Should Be Embraced: Making mistakes and experiencing the consequences that go along with them can serve as the best learning tool of all for our children—so long as the stakes aren't too high and their health and safety aren't at risk. Teach your child how to step back, examine what may have gone wrong and encourage them to think about how different choices may have led to a more positive outcome. We must resist the temptation to make excuses for our children's poor choices or bail them out of difficult situations so that they may avoid the negative consequences. Children need to learn that every choice has a consequence, for better or worse, and they must be held accountable for their actions.

In summary, we must accept our children's desire and need for increased independence and freedom while still providing guidance and support. In doing so, we provide our adolescents the opportunity they need to learn from their mistakes, take personal responsibility for their actions and grow in both maturity and self-discipline.

Sources: [Education.com: Freedom and Limits for Teens.](#)
[Pam Lehman — Community Action Network, Feb. 2011.](#)
[U.S. Department of Education: Independence – Helping Your Child Through Early Adolescence.](#)