

THE TEENAGE NEED FOR INDEPENDENCE

12 TIPS TO SURVIVE IT



learn
laugh
play

1. Independence Is Not Rejection

Parenting teens! Most of us just didn't see it coming when we decided to have a baby. How long did we spend worrying about the pram and the car seat? How many newborn baby outfits were there compared to how many thoughts about the teenage years!? For most of us, if we are honest, there were a lot more babygrows than thoughts.

Whether you planned to home educate or that decision was made further down the road; having teens at home and sharing their learning with them, can be amazing but it can also add to how much we worry and how intense the parenting dynamic can feel.

Here are 12 quick ideas to help navigate the independent teen phase. Remember that you are doing the best you can and raising a fantastic young person - even when it doesn't feel like that!



1. Independence Is Not Rejection

One of the tricky parts of parenting teens is remembering that their growing independence is not a personal rejection. This is much easier said than done, but if we can try to remember that it is a natural part of growing up, then it can hurt less. Letting our teenagers develop independence (within boundaries that we feel comfortable with) is a way of showing our teenagers love and trust.

2. Avoid the Worry Loop

It is so easy to get stuck in a worry loop. Are they withdrawing? Am I too strict? Am I too relaxed?

It is actually helpful to give yourself some grace. Accepting that this is a steep learning curve for you, and you are not going to get it right all the time, can actually be quite freeing and stop some of the worry!

3. Set Clear But Calm Boundaries

Independence works best when you set clear boundaries. You have to feel comfortable and you are right to set expectations around safety, sleep, time spent online, being respectful and being a part of your family. You will need to compromise sometimes, but your voice still matters - you are still the adult!

4. Create Predictable Connection Points

Regular small rituals matter. Our tendency as parents is to hang on to past rituals but for many teenagers this can feel as if we are trying to stop them from growing up. If this is the case, then creating new rituals that are more “grown up” can be a lovely way to connect. For example, a weekly film night, sharing meals, or chatting in the car. If there is regular conflict then small bite sized connections regularly might be the best way to keep things positive!

5. Respect Their Private Space

Understanding our teenagers’ need for privacy (their bedrooms, journals and friendships for example) can be hard but it is really important to respect that our teenagers need their own space to grow. Clearly this should not be confused with allowing teenagers to do whatever they like. But having some things that are their own is a part of exploring their own identity.

6. Keep Communication Low Drama

If every conversation becomes intense, teens will avoid them. If you need to discuss tricky topics, try to keep your tone calm and keep it brief. If your teen’s eyes are rolling then you have probably talked for too long!

7. Allow Safe Risk Taking

Again, this has to be managed, and your feelings do matter, but allowing your teen to grow, is going to sometimes mean allowing them to take small risks. We are not suggesting anything that is going to put them in any danger of course. But giving them the chance to make a mistake and learn from it, or not make a mistake and thrive, is crucial for their sense of self. Examples might include them trying new activities, managing their money or making their own decisions about how to organise their time. Stepping back slightly will allow their confidence to grow.

8. Notice Effort, Not Just Outcome

Teens still need encouragement – even if they pretend they don't! Instead of focusing only on results, try to notice the small efforts they make. This will help your teen to feel appreciated and connected to you. If for example, they take responsibility, show kindness or use initiative - take the opportunity to tell them how impressed you are and how proud you are of the person they are becoming..

9. Talk About Online Life Openly

Instead of banning or fearing technology, try to be curious. By opening up a conversation about the platforms they use, who they follow and what kind of content they enjoy, you are showing an interest in their world. Be prepared for them to laugh at your lack of knowlege here though!

10. Encourage Independent Study Skills

It might not feel like it to either of you, but being home educated is already teaching your child to think for themselves and be a creative thinker in ways that children at school often don't get to do. When they are ready, you can use home education as a real opportunity to encourage your child to start to work towards their own goals and develop independence as a learner.

11. Protect Your Own Wellbeing

Teens sense parental stress quickly. Make space for your own interests, friendships and rest. Independence is easier to support when you are not exhausted. Reach out and make sure that you have support from a partner, a friend or a family member.

12. Connection Evolves — It Doesn't End

The reality is that your relationship with your teen is going to change, but this does not mean it is going to disappear. Many teens pull away slightly for a while but try to remember you aren't losing them and they still need you and love you.

