



Monthly Parenting Tip from the ACFC

January 2024

Prevention Strategies for Parents—Part 4

We've emphasized before the importance of opening communication with your teen by taking a non-judgmental attitude about whatever they think or feel. The same is NOT true for behavior. You want to be clear that some behaviors are off limits. Taking the time to agree on clear guidelines for behavior with your teen can pay off greatly when your teen has to make a choice. Not every situation in a teen's life calls for parents to impose guidelines around it. In fact, it's easy to go too far and end up overprotecting your teen with so many guidelines that they have no decisions left to make for themselves. Parents who overprotect their teen fail to prepare them for future independence. So choose carefully where you establish guidelines. The best place to start is with situations in your teen's life that may introduce risks related to drugs, sexuality, and violence. For example:

- curfews
- having friends over, or spending nights out
- going to parties or places that could be dangerous
- dating
- driving, or riding with friends

One hard and fast guideline for behavior that you can use is a "no-use" rule: Parents and teens make an agreement (either verbally or in writing) stating that everyone in the family will obey the law as it applies to the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. It can be stated like this: "No use of illegal drugs by anyone in the family, and no use of alcohol or nicotine by anyone under the legal age of ____." The no-use rule can be part of your family's discussion about the harmful effects of alcohol and other drugs. Once the rule is established, it's important for you to let your teen know that you expect them to abide by the rule. This means no experimenting or social use, either. Be careful not to sabotage your own rule by giving the message that "all kids will try it" or that "rules were made to be broken."

For rules to carry impact, you must back them up with consequences. If you have no reason to suspect your teen of breaking the no-use rule, discuss consequences with them in general terms only. If your teen breaks the no-use rule, then you can use more specific consequences. Rather than relying on the common and usually ineffectual consequence of grounding, it will have more impact if you suspend specific privileges, possessions, and favors that your teen wants from you.

To learn more about effective parenting skills, visit the Active Parenting Online Video Library. These helpful videos are offered free of charge by the ACFC in partnership with Active Parenting. Guidance and help are available for parents of children of all ages. To access the Online Video Library, go to the [ACFC website](https://www.acfc.org), click on the Active Parenting tab, and follow the instructions on how to view the videos.



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