



TIPS FOR PARENTS

While many youth have good intentions about making responsible choices, they need help connecting these desires to actions. This report demonstrates the important role adults play in shaping youth's decision making.

Parents should aim to accomplish the following:

1. Help Bridge Intent and Action. Youth today say they want to take the responsible road, but intent and action do not always match. Influence from peers often sidetracks young people from acting according to their intentions. Parents can help youth actualize their intentions by helping them maintain focus on their goals—to help them become the type of person they aspire to—emphasizing the role of actions taken today in determining outcomes in the future.

2. Promote Shared Decision Making. Youth with parents who involve them in the decision-making process or explain to them the rationale behind key decisions tend to have more positive outcomes. Take the time to engage with your daughter/son, making decisions collaboratively rather than telling them what to do or forcing them to do what you believe is right. Discuss with your son or daughter their decision-making process rather than judge them. Enter conversations open-mindedly to see various sides of an issue rather than initiate “right/wrong” exchanges that tend to divide adults and youth and stop conversations abruptly.

3. Experience Community Engagement Together. Today's youth highly value civic and community engagement, but previous research from the GSRI shows that they often do not feel they have the places and opportunities to fulfill this desire. Girls especially are interested in making a difference in the world around them. Youth are most interested in engaging at the community level, so try to connect what is going on locally with their interests and skills. Partner with your daughter/son in these activities to demonstrate your support and enhance your relationship in the process.

4. Treat Personal Struggles with Respect. Youth have to deal with all sorts of daily challenges, from how they treat friends and strangers in school to whether they help a friend cheat to how they deal with defeat or victory on the sports field. Some of these issues are black and white, but a lot involve dilemmas, where truth and loyalty can collide with justice and fairness. Give youth an opportunity to talk about these issues, challenge them to think deeply about them, and treat their personal struggles with respect.

5. Help Youth Voice Their Views. Today's youth are more comfortable speaking their minds and voicing their opinions than were the youth of previous generations. Talk to young people about what's going on in their lives as they're developing their own voice and sense of judgment. Ask what influences their decision making, with regard to relationships, their peers, the media, and adult supports such as teachers and coaches. We know that youth feel pressure to figure out their plans for the future—ask them what this pressure stems from and devise healthy ways to cope with it.

Source: Good Intentions: The Beliefs and Values of Teens and Tweens Today (2009)