

## Principles of Parenting

# Communicating With Your Teen: Spending Time Together

► Discover practical and creative activities that you and your teen can share—and enjoy!—together.

Teens often spend less time with parents than they spend with other teens. But parents should not assume that their teens no longer need or want to spend time with them. Because teens can do more on their own and have other places to be than home with the family, parents often back off and give their teens too much space.

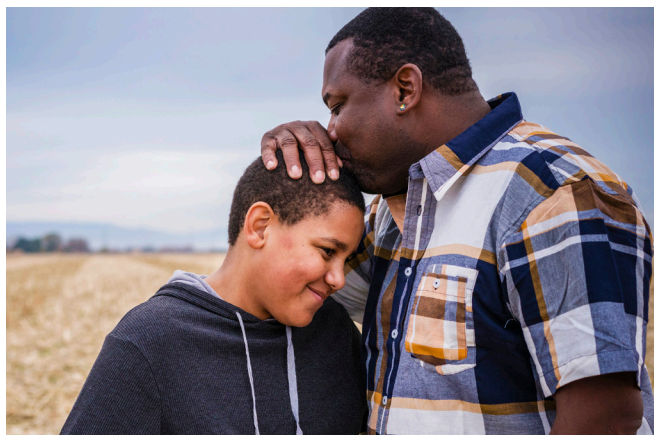
Some privacy and opportunities to be away from you are good for your teens. They can have too much privacy, however, and too little time with you. Your teen still needs to spend time and do activities with you. But time together is different once children become teens, and the time together is different for different teens.

## When Your Teen Wants to Spend Less Time With You

Geraldine's feelings were hurt when her daughter Angela stopped telling her all her secrets. "Now she tells her girlfriends the things she used to tell me," Geraldine said with sadness in her voice.

Instead of feeling sad about the changes, Geraldine can think of Angela's friendships with other teens as evidence that she has done a good job in raising her daughter. Research shows that children who have close, connected relationships with parents are better able to form healthy relationships with other teens and adults.

Just because Angela does not tell Geraldine all her secrets, Geraldine can still maintain a close relationship with Angela, but it will be different than it was when Angela was younger. One way to stay connected is to find activities to share. Both Geraldine and Angela enjoy being outside. They possibly can find common interests in gardening, hiking nature trails, painting the shutters around the house, or simply walking the family dog together in the evening.



## Parent-Teen Activities

You and your teen can find many ways to spend time together. It is important to make the most of the moments you do have together rather than trying to plan the perfect moments that may never happen.

Be realistic about your schedule and your teen's schedule. Both of you have things you need or want to do away from home, such as work, school, time with friends, and activities with other special groups to which you each belong. You also have time commitments to other family members.

Finding time for each other when you both feel like it can be a challenge. Find activities that easily fit into each of your schedules. These might include preparing a meal together occasionally, going for a walk, sending each other emails, or working on household tasks that you both enjoy.

Occasionally do something together that takes a little more planning: hike a favorite park, take an art class, read the same book and take time to talk about it, do a volunteer activity, or plan a "just us day" that involves doing activities in town that you both enjoy. If you have

an older teen that is considering college or a job after high school, plan to take trips together to visit possible colleges or places of employment.

**Make the most of the time you spend together:**

- Keep most of your one-on-one time together light.
- Don't only ask your teen about behavior and friends each time you are together.
- Use your time together to enjoy each other. Find shared interests and ways to feel comfortable. At a later time when situations get heavy, you will really be able to talk.

## **Increase Your Teen's Interest in Spending Time With You**

**Listen to your teen's ideas of what would be fun or interesting—and do them.**

Mark has been trying to get his parents to go on a weeklong camping trip with him, but there never seems to be time. One Saturday morning when the weather is nice, Mark says to his parents, "Let's go camping at the park that's only 30 minutes away. We can get the car loaded in an hour or two and we'll still have plenty of light to set up our tents. It shouldn't be too crowded this time of year. We can spend the afternoon and evening there and then come home on Sunday morning."

Mark's parents realize that they don't have any special plans for Saturday, and the park nearby would be a nice getaway. The family has a great time enjoying the outdoors, cooking over a fire, and telling funny stories.

Mark is pleased that his parents finally decided to do something he wanted to do. His parents realize that spending time together as a family is something that really helps them feel close, and they agree with Mark that he had a very good idea.

**When your teen initiates time with you, try to stop what you are doing and spend at least a brief period doing something together.**

Kate is looking out the window watching a bluebird at the bird feeder. She calls to her mom to come watch the bird. Mom calls back that she is in the middle of washing the dishes. Kate goes into the kitchen and tells Mom that she has to come see this spectacular bird. Mom sees the excitement in Kate's face, puts down her dish towel, and joins Kate at the window to watch the bluebird.

Mom and daughter end up spending half an hour enjoying the bird, talking together about their day, and simply enjoying each other's company. Mom is glad she took the time to be with her daughter.

**Take an interest in what your teen likes and become more informed on these topics. You will have more to talk about with each other.**

Martina loves to dance to her favorite songs on her phone. She walks around the house singing the songs she likes, often not hearing her dad when he asks her something. He can't understand why she is always singing those songs.

One day he listens to some of her music. The two talk about the songs she likes and Dad begins to understand why music is important to her. Martina asks her dad what kind of music he likes; he shares it with her. Lately, Dad and Martina have been spending more time together sharing something they both enjoy—music.

**When doing a shared activity, let your teen take the lead sometimes to show you how to do something or tell you his or her point of view.**

Alvin loves to create desserts. His mother Lilly also is quite a chef. One afternoon, Lilly is preparing a birthday cake for Alvin's sister. Alvin comes in and asks if she would like some help. Lilly says, "Of course!" Alvin shows her some new ways to decorate the cake. Lilly is impressed with Alvin's talent, and Alvin enjoys showing his mother something new.

Following are a few activity ideas to get *you* started. It's important to select activities that both you and your teen find enjoyable. You are more likely to do the activity if it fits in with your lifestyle and you both feel you have positive experiences when you do it.





What You Might Do	How You Might Do It	Why It's a Good Thing
<b>Cook</b>	Try doing a creative meal together once a month. Both of you do the planning and agree that each of your ideas will be included. Talk about the kinds of foods you want to try. Consider new recipes and adventures in cooking. In planning the meal, each of you will contribute to food selection, food preparation, and food presentation. Divide the responsibilities equally and let your teen make as many decisions as you do. Have family and friends join you to enjoy the meal (and help to clean up).	You get to be creative and adventurous. Your teen spends some time being in charge and responsible. Eating good food feels good, and you get to share these good feelings.
<b>Use an app or computer</b>	Consider creating something that contains files that only you and your teen share. These can include accounts of special memories, dreams, challenges that have been mastered over the years, promises, and letters to each other.	You both get to share your views and get to know each other better. It can open conversations about your family and ways to feel close and connected to each other.
<b>Garden</b>	Creating a garden can be done gradually. It is always growing. Decide together about the shape of the garden, what to plant and where, and how to decorate it. You also can have a specific area in your garden that your teen gets to design and manage any way he or she likes.	Gardening is an ongoing venture that allows for creativity, shared hard work, and shared rewards of your efforts.



What You Might Do	How You Might Do It	Why It's a Good Thing
<b>Enjoy sports</b>	If you and your teen are active in sports, try sharing a sport on a regular basis. Use it as a time to unwind together and challenge each other, but be a good sport whether you win or lose. Consider playing tennis, soccer, basketball, or badminton. You also might enjoy swimming, fishing, running, or cycling.	Even though the intensity may change over time, you can enjoy sports for many years to come. Experiencing good sportsmanship is a valuable life lesson for your teen.
<b>Read</b>	Many teens like to read interesting books and think about what they read. It might be fun to talk about a book you both read. If you enjoy doing this, you may want to expand your shared reading to include a few friends of your teens and some of their parents. Take turns thinking of interesting questions to discuss and activities you can do related to the books you read.	Many ideas can be shared when you read together. Discuss issues that characters face that may offer insights about your own lives.
<b>Learn about fitness</b>	This is about getting healthy, not dieting or losing weight. If this is something that you and your teen want to do, learn together what it means to eat healthy. Work together to design a fitness plan that includes healthy meals and exercise activities that you can enjoy together. Explore exercise options together.	Health is important. Sharing this important aspect of your lives is a way to offer each other support and nurturance. You also will help your teen to develop a good attitude about physical fitness and self-care.
<b>Exploring photography</b>	Creating photo albums and picture collages of some of your favorite snapshots can be a great thing to share. Together you and your teen can design these collections to reflect your favorite people, special events in your lives, and exciting places you have lived and traveled. You can take turns creating the layouts and deciding on the captions to go with your pictures.	Whether you think of photography as an art form or a way to capture precious memories and people in your lives, sharing this activity leads to many opportunities for enjoyable moments with your teen. Pictures help families keep their history alive and remember special times.



Revised by **Adrienne Duke**, *Extension Specialist*, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University. Written by **Jennifer Kerpelman**, *former Extension Specialist*.

**For more information**, contact your county Extension office. Visit [www.aces.edu/directory](http://www.aces.edu/directory).

Trade and brand names used in this publication are given for information purposes only. No guarantee, endorsement, or discrimination among comparable products is intended or implied by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) is an equal opportunity educator and employer. Everyone is welcome! Please let us know if you have accessibility needs.

**Revised October 2021**, HE-0782

© 2021 by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. All rights reserved.

[www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu)