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Self Reliance and Independence: Giving Our Teenage Girls the Ultimate Gift by Debra Beck

What every parent wants for their child is to give them the tools to become mature adults, that "know-how" to make good decisions for themselves.

So how can we help our kids learn how to make good decisions for themselves? When they leave the house at 18 years old... when we are nowhere around, and they are faced with a problem...we want them to have a bag of tools they can use to make a decision that is in their best interest.

All parents want to help empower their teenage girls with positive tools for building self esteem. What does it take? Practice, Practice, Practice.

The way I see it is if you want to get good at something, you have to practice. So, we have to give our kids practice with making decisions. Every time an issue arises, whether it be their issue or an issue of someone else's they are talking about, an opportunity presents itself to practice. When something comes up where a decision needs to be made, instead of saying "this is the way it is, because I'm your parent", try sitting with them and discussing the problem. Write down the pros and cons and ask them what decision they would make and why. Don't get emotionally involved (meaning try to keep your fears out of it).



Listening, without judging, is a learned skill for parents, requiring practice and patience

Here's an example: Your daughter says something about a girl at school, who is smoking cigarettes at 12 years old. Instead of freaking out and saying "are you kidding, she is way too young to smoke, do her parents know about this", try to remember that this is an opportunity to communicate with your teen. The definition of communication is: the exchange of information between individuals, not the opinion of one person.

Teenage girls need assurance that their feelings are important: listening lets them know you care.

Ask your teen what she thinks about smoking, what are the things that are cool about it, and what are the things that are not good about it. You may be saying, "COOL ABOUT IT, are you crazy, there is nothing cool about it"; again your opinion is not communication. I guarantee you there are kids that think smoking is cool. Ask your teen what she thinks about the girl at school who is smoking at 12, does she think it is a good decision or not. Then listen to her answers. I'm not saying that if your teen comes up with more reasons to smoke than not, that you buy her a pack of cigarettes.

Teenage girls are smart; your goal is to help them practice making good decisions, not make the decisions for them.

Give teens the opportunity to show you they have a good head on their shoulders. Again, the goal is to help them practice making good decisions, rather than making the decisions for them through your opinions. What we want are teens who feel free to come to us with anything: if they feel judgments, which most of the time your opinions will feel like, they will not want to communicate with you.

So here are the tips plain and simple.

- Start communicating with your teen; leave your opinions out of the conversation.
- Every time something comes up that appears to be a good topic, i.e., smoking, drinking, body image, sex, drugs, friendships, careers, schools, style—okay any topic will do—practice, practice, practice!
- Practice by asking them questions about how they feel about it, go over the pros and cons, and ask them what they would do and why.

Allowing your teenage girls to lead the decision-making process will empower them to make good choices when you are not around.

The more teens learn how to make good decisions, the more confident they will be with who they are and continue to make good decisions. Would you agree that you as a parent have more experience with decision-making than your 13 year old? Of course you do, so make sure they feel free to come to you to learn this process.



Practice, practice, practice. Communication, not judgement, will empower your teenage girls to make the right decisions.