

INSIGHTS

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Giving adolescents freedom and minimising risk

Young people typically want more independence. But giving young people more rope can be downright tricky for parents these days. Here are some ideas to help.....

Adolescents usually want more freedom than parents are prepared to give.

Most teenagers think they are **three years older** than they really are, and many parents think their teenage children are three years younger than they really are. Getting the 'freedom' balance right is obviously quite tricky, though it often comes with experience.

You are probably familiar with the fact that the teenage brain is very much a work-in-progress. Parents of teenage children should carry a little card with the words **"Teenager: Brain under Construction"** printed on it to remind them that young people are poor assessors of risk.

Adolescents often act first, and think later. This means parents need to be very hands-on with their parenting in this potentially tricky stage.

It's important that parents put processes in place that will help reduce risk and keep their young people in this age group safe. These include: expecting teenagers to maintain contact with you; setting time limits for being out; and rewarding responsible behaviour with greater freedom. There are three things parents need to know when their young people go out:

1. **Where are you going?**
2. **Who are you going with?**
3. **When will you be home?**

From my experience most parents ask the first two questions, but often forget to ask the third question – *When will you be home?* Get into the habit of asking this question each time your adolescent steps outside the front door to go out with their peers.

[Link greater freedom to responsible behaviour](#)

Young people often use their peers as leverage when they want more freedom. *"Everyone else in my class is allowed to go to..."* This type of comment is hard for a parent to resist.

But it's better to link greater freedom with responsible behaviour rather than going along with what the crowd is doing.

When adolescents show they can act safely within limits (*of place,*

time and people) then push those limits out (*stay out later, go further afield, go with a wider crowd*) accordingly.

It takes some parenting steel to act in this way – that's why parents generally need to support each other when raising teenagers.



Here are five simple parenting ideas to build independence in your young person:

1. Never do for a teenager the things they can do for **themselves**
2. **Monitor** kids' movements without being too restrictive
3. Reduce risks for teenagers through **skilling up & scaffolding**
4. Build **expectations** around remaining in contact and home times
5. **Reward** responsible behaviour with greater freedom