

MAIL | You might also like: That's Fit, Parenting and More Complete our survey for a chance at \$1,000!

Search for conditions, drugs and more

Main Diseases & Conditions Family Health Healthy Living Diet & Fitness Experts Tools News Send Feedback

Main » Family Health » Teen Health

## Teen Health

### Family Health

- Caregiver Support
- Children's Health
- Men's Health
- Senior's Health
- Teen Health
- Women's Health

### Related Articles

- Parenting an ADHD Child, Age by Age
- Should Parents Let Teens Drink At Home?
- Dads' Postpartum Depression Ups Odds of Spankings

### Teen Health Conditions

- Acne
- ADHD
- Alcohol Abuse
- Allergies
- Asthma
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- STDs

## Help Your Children Have Healthy Relationships

R R R

0 0 0 2

Like

By **Stephanie Tweito Jacob** Jul 30th 2010 4:18PM



Whether kids develop healthy **relationship** skills -- like how to compromise, how to resolve conflict and how to get along with others -- may ultimately affect their well-being as adults. "We know that **relationships** are both the biggest source of happiness and the biggest source of unhappiness in most adults' lives," says Dr. Brett

Laursen, a professor of psychology at Florida Atlantic University in Fort Lauderdale.

Kids who are more socially skilled tend to be well liked by other children and have better quality friendships during youth and adolescence. "Good social skills can help kids to not be rejected by others and to not become aggressive or disruptive -- things that have a really positive impact on their well-being," says Dr. Judi Smetana, a professor of psychology at the University of Rochester in Rochester, N.Y.

While there's a number of sources that influence kids' social skills, parents play a big role, says Smetana. Here's what you can do to teach your kids how to have healthy **relationships**.

#### Think about your own **relationship** with your child.

The stronger your relationship with your child, the more effective your parenting will be. "Kids of all ages are more apt to trust, listen and open up to parents with whom they have a trusting, affectionate relationship," says Smetana. "That emotional bond between parents and kids is so important for the child's well-being. It's the root of all relationships." Things like being attentive to your child's needs, acting respectful toward them and listening to them can help strengthen that bond.

#### Start early.

Parents should start talking to kids about relationships as soon as the children begin interacting with other people and kids, says Smetana. That may be in a multichild care setting for some, playdates or parks for others, but children as young as age 2 can, in simple ways, start to understand things like developing respect for others and learning not to hurt people, she says.

If kids grow up talking to parents about relationships, they'll be more comfortable doing so as they enter adolescence and become adults. "Just as you ask your child how their day in school was on a regular basis, you should also be asking how things are with their friends and who they're getting along with," says Laursen.

ADVERTISEMENT

## Family Health Tools

SYMPTOM CHECKER

DRUG INTERACTION CHECKER

MORE TOOLS

## AOL Health News

### Artificially Colored Foods May Soon Carry Hyperactivity Warning Labels

Mar 30, 2011 10:30AM

After denying a potential link between artificial ... [Read More](#)

### Cavities Are Contagious

Mar 29, 2011 4:00PM

Did you ever think a cavity could be contagious? ... [Read More](#)

### Romantic Breakups Can Cause Physical Pain, Study Shows

Mar 29, 2011 2:00PM

Love hurts. It sounds like a cliché, but new ... [Read More](#)

### FDA Approves Medtronic Defibrillators

Mar 29, 2011 12:00PM

The Food and Drug Administration has approved a ... [Read More](#)

### Men Feel Old at 58, Women at Only 29

Mar 28, 2011 4:00PM

Women feel like they're getting old when they're a ...

**Allow them to play with others.**

There are things kids learn from interacting with equals -- friends and peers -- that they can't learn from the more hierarchal parent-child relationship or from siblings. "Learning to work things out, resolve conflicts and negotiate are particularly important in peer relationships and friendships because it's hard for kids to learn that from their parents," says Smetana.

Setting up playdates for younger kids and allowing older children to have friends over to the house encourages interaction. If kids are having trouble forming friends, a few well-chosen playdates -- typically group activities for boys and twosomes for girls -- can help, says Laursen, as can initiating a get-together with a classmate your child already gets along with well at school.

**Talk about their reactions and point out consequences.**

As you monitor park or playtime, point out various positive and negative socializing as it happens. If your child gets hit or has his toys taken away -- or sees it happen to another child -- talk to him about how it made him feel or how the other child reacted. "They'll have an intrinsic response -- it may hurt or they'll think it's unfair -- or if they see the other child get hurt, they can reflect on their own feelings and the other child's feelings and think about that in relationship to why it might be wrong," says Smetana.

It's important to explain why something isn't fair and why actions might have harmful effects -- as opposed to just saying, "Don't do it" -- and to ask kids to think about how the other person would feel. "These help kids focus on the consequences of their actions, which is important for long-term moral development," says Smetana.

With older kids, parents may notice they have one friend today and a different one the next. "There should be constant dialogue," says Laursen. "Why is that and what happened and who did you have lunch with today, who did you play with at recess today," he says. "Parents can talk about how they handled it and how they might do it better in the future."

**Listen.**

Even though parents may know they're right about a certain behavior or situation, it's essential they listen to their child's perspective. "Kids' outlooks can be really different from parents -- what their motivations were, what they think happened," says Smetana. "Acknowledge that you understand why your child felt that way and then point out, 'Maybe you didn't think about this or that.'"

**Carefully suggest strategies.**

When talking to your kids about how they handled a particular social situation, it's essential to focus on specific behaviors that could be changed, not the child and her personality. "Parents should convey love and support for the child, even if they aren't happy about particular behaviors," says Smetana.

Children with good social skills tend to be cooperative, agreeable and empathetic, says Laursen, so encouraging those behaviors may be helpful.

**Ask the teacher.**

Talking to your child's teacher may also help. "A lot of social skills training happens in schools," says Smetana. "The teacher may have a handle on how kids behave around other kids that parents may not have."

**Adjust the tone as kids get older.**

No surprise here: As kids get older, they're less interested in being instructed by their parents on friends and relationships, and they have more control over the information that's coming your way. Conversations have to take a more subtle tone, says Laursen, and frequent short conversations are better than one large discussion.

Talking about your own friendships and the things that came up when you were that age or having discussions during meal times when your spouse or an older sibling can also weigh in can take the focus off the child, which may encourage him to talk about his own relationships. Just don't put kids on the spot and make

[Read More](#) [Help Your Children Have Healthy Relationships](#)

## Beauty and Skincare



Getty Images

Need beauty advice? Let AOL Health be your guide.

[Sugar Causes Wrinkles?](#)

[Best Celeb Skin](#)

[Beauty Risks](#)

## Healthy Eating



Corbis

Eating healthy has never tasted so good on AOL Health.

[20 Foods for Weight Loss](#)

[Eat Your Veggies](#)

[Superfoods for Your Body](#)

### SPONSORED LINKS

#### Globe Life Insurance

\$1\* Buys \$50,000 Life Insurance. No Medical Exam, No Waiting Period.

[www.CoverageFor1Dollar.com](http://www.CoverageFor1Dollar.com)

#### Curves: Free Week Pass

Burn 500 Calories in 30 Minutes. Sign up Today to Learn More.

[www.Curves.com](http://www.Curves.com)

#### \$39/mo Car Insurance?

Most pay \$700 twice a year. Do you pay too much? Compare Quotes now!

<http://www.1minuteautoinsurance.com>

them feel bad in front of others -- that should be done one on one.

The same goes for dating. Questions about other kids are more likely to segue into them talking about their own experiences. But remember, while you can encourage them to think about whether they have other options, they don't want to hear you disapprove. "Once you're opening them up, you really have to curb the urge to render judgment, or you're not going to hear anything more from them," cautions Laursen.

**More on Children's Health:**

[Are Plastic Containers Dangerous for Children](#)

[12 Ways to Improve Your Family's Health](#)

0 0 0 2

Like

## Around the Web



[Would You Give Up Sex to Be Skinny? \(The Stir\)](#)



[Can Your Mate's Be a Clue to Potential Cheating? \(Time\)](#)



[Dos and Don'ts for the Morning After \(YourTango\)](#)



[15 Real Reasons You Dumped Him \(The Frisky\)](#)

### SPONSORED LINKS

**Lower Cholesterol Levels**

Great Advice To Lower Your Cholesterol Levels. Recipes, Diets & More  
[JustClickLocal.com](#)

**Save \$1.00 on Wolfgang Puck® Soup**

When you buy any one (1) Wolfgang Puck®...  
[Shortcuts.com](#)

**Globe Life Insurance**

\$1\* Buys \$50,000 Life Insurance. No Medical Exam, No Waiting Period.  
[www.CoverageFor1Dollar.com](#)

[Buy a link here](#)

### Related Videos

< ... >



Learn about Co-Parenting Relationship



Co-Parenting Relationship Tips



Should Single Parents with Kids Date other Singles with Kids

## More Health Headlines



McKay Jenkins, Ph.D.:  
Protecting Ourselves From  
An Invisible Danger:  
Environmental Toxins

Polls: Do People Want To  
Legalize Pot?

**More from HuffPost  
Health**

Myths and Facts About  
Vaccines

Rheumatoid Arthritis Diet  
Tips

**More from Health.com**

Can a Mother's Pregnancy  
Diet Influence Her Child's  
Future Weight?

Hand Transplant Recipient,  
Adapting Well, Shows Off  
New Hand

**More from TIME**

Parents: Surgeon  
Operated on Wrong Eye of  
Washington Boy

How to Obtain  
Guardianship for Adults  
With Autism

**More from Fox News  
Health**

Charlie Sheen Loses Bid  
for Sole Custody of Twins

Top 5 Green Celebrities

**More from iVillage**

Search for conditions, drugs and more

[Send Feedback](#)

**Quick Links**

- [Health Care Reform](#)
- [Children's Health](#)
- [Lower Cholesterol](#)
- [Stop Smoking](#)
- [Symptom Checker](#)
- [Drugs A-Z](#)
- [Health Topics A-Z](#)

**On AOL Health**

- [Anxiety Disorders](#)
- [Asthma](#)
- [Back Pain Treatments](#)
- [Breast Cancer](#)
- [Cancers](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Diabetes](#)

**On AOL Health**

- [Headaches & Migraines](#)
- [Heart Disease](#)
- [Lupus Symptoms](#)
- [Sleep Disorders](#)
- [Shingles](#)
- [Women's Sexual Health](#)
- [Men's Health](#)

**Diet & Fitness**

- [Diet Plans](#)
- [Mediterranean Diet](#)
- [Lose Belly Fat](#)
- [Flat Belly Diet](#)
- [High Fiber Foods](#)
- [Weight Loss Program](#)
- [Yoga Poses](#)

**Across AOL**

- [Health in Spanish](#)
- [Beauty and Fashion](#)
- [Coupons](#)
- [Healthy Recipes](#)
- [Home and Gardens](#)
- [Horoscopes](#)

**Across AOL**

- [Women's History Month News](#)
- [ParentDish](#)
- [Pet Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Weddings](#)



[Advertise With Us](#) | [About Our Ads](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Updated Terms of Service](#) | [Updated Privacy Policy](#) | [Trademarks](#) | [What's New](#) | [FAQ](#) | [AOL Downloads](#)

© Copyright 2011 AOL Inc. All Rights Reserved.