

A Major Ingredient in the  
Recipe for Education Success

# parent power

## grades 9-12



Sometimes it's easy to forget about the important role that families play in children's education—especially as children become teenagers. Teens are finding their own identity and asserting their independence. And parents can find adolescents baffling because they are simultaneously grown up and not grown up. What continues to be clear is that adolescents need adult guidance.

## The Problem-Solving **Habit**

Even teenagers can get used to sizing up a problem and coming up with commonsense ways to solve it. Here's a six-step method that works and can be used easily at home by parent and child.

### **step 1** *Defining the problem*

This is a first, often overlooked, step in problem solving. You have to be able to state or define the problem and, if there's a conflict, the opposing views and feelings about the issue. For example: for a teen, it might be whether to go to a certain party; for a parent, whether to ask for a raise.

### **step 2** *Identifying Options*

This is when you come up with a variety of solutions. Brain-storm as many solutions as possible without judging which ones are better than others. Just keep the ideas coming.

### **step 3** *Evaluating Solutions*

This is when you evaluate the different solutions. What are the pros and cons of each one? You're making judgments, assessing the possible solutions in light of your experience and the way

the world works. And in this process you may well come up with a new and better solution than any you originally thought of.

### **step 4** *Making the Decision*

This is the moment you choose a solution to try. Pick one or perhaps two based on the decisions made in Step 3. Talk about why you selected these solutions.

### **step 5** *Putting the Decision into Action*

Now put your decision to the test. In advance, talk about what will happen and what might be expected. What obstacles can you anticipate? What "helps" can you expect? How can traps be avoided by building on the helps?

### **step 6** *Evaluating the Decision*

This is the follow up, the evaluation of your decision and what followed from it. How did it work? What changes must be made in the solution so that it will work better? What would you try next time? It's possible that a decision that sounded good will not work as well in real life. But, overall, there is a greater chance for success when decisions and solutions are selected based upon this step-by-step process.

After going through the process with one problem, ask your teenager to try another. Review the six steps so that everyone will be able to keep on using them afterward. The goal is to help teens get into the habit of this kind of rational problem solving.

## the problem **bank**

Just in case you don't have enough problems of your own to solve, here are a few you can use to practice the six-step problem-solving method:

Who gets to use the car?

Why is it bad to smoke?

When does the garbage get taken out?

What happens when I go for a few days with little sleep?

How much TV are we going to watch?

Can I buy a new pair of jeans?

Whose turn is it to go grocery shopping?

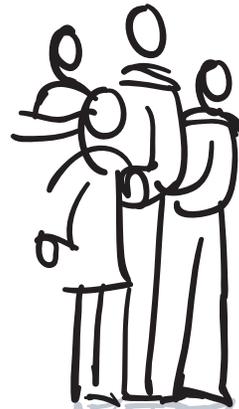
What happens when I take a test without studying for it?

Why can't I go to that after-school party?

## feelings are **important**

Start talking about how family members feel. Here's a KNOW YOURSELF activity: Think together about what makes people angry. Everyone gets angry for different reasons. Some people get angry when others take something from them; others get angry when people don't listen. Ask yourselves: What do we do when we get angry? Some people try to cool off before they speak. Others start fights. Some people scream. Some people don't say anything. What do you do?

Caring about others is another area teens can often use help with. Talk together about the problems of being a parent and the problems of being a student. Think about a recent situation in which you disagreed with each other. Exchange places: the parent is the youngster, and the youngster the parent. Afterward, talk about it. Do you understand each other better now?



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