

Parenting College-Age Youth

by Dr. Pam Monday

Congratulations! You have a college-age child – that means you have successfully gotten through the tough developmental periods of infancy, early childhood, and the teenage years. Pat yourselves on the back! Now, your job isn't over yet – but there are some things you might want to know about parenting the college-age person. Here are some helpful "Do's" and "Don'ts".

DO:

Realize you have little control over the choices your child makes. You have already taught them values; now it's up to them to incorporate them into their lives. Expect them to make mistakes – that's how everyone learns! Compliment them and praise them every chance you get. Research shows that kids need a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative statements from parents to have a trusting relationship, and to have high self-esteem. Too often parents forget to "catch" kids in the act of doing well and instead focus on the negatives. Set clear rules with clear consequences regarding your performance expectations for school, work, chores, etc. if they are living with you or if they are dependent upon you for financial support. Without clear rules, parents frequently feel used or resentful, and kids often continue irresponsible behavior. All people need structure and clarity to learn responsible behavior. Set consequences and limits that you can, and will, enforce. Kids need to trust that you will follow through on what you say you are going to do. Remember that maturity means disciplining oneself; prior to reaching maturity, young adults need the security of limits and consequences to help them learn self-discipline. Consistently follow-through on consequences. Inconsistency reinforces negative behavior and teaches young people that they can get away with irresponsible behavior, or that they can manipulate others to avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Have an open, healthy relationship with your spouse. Healthy families have parents who model healthy relating. If you have problems in your marriage, get help for yourselves. Stay calm and listen to your student, even when you don't agree with what they are saying. Listen to understand the feelings behind the words; and empathize with what your child is feeling. This models respectful listening, an

DON'T:

Nag, yell, lecture, moralize, punish, shame, put-down, humiliate, scold, or embarrass your child. This behavior never teaches people how to take responsibility for their behavior, and always damages the relationship. Without a good relationship with your child, your positive

influence on that child will not be felt. When people feel threatened, they get defensive and are not open to input. Don't shut down communication with your child by doing the above behaviors. Students learn to withhold information from parents who do any of the above. Do for your child what they can and should do for themselves. Teach them how to balance a checkbook, use the computer, write a paper, budget; don't do it for them. And don't rescue them from the consequences of their behavior. If they don't pay, the electric bill because they went skiing instead, let them have a few days without electricity or let them propose a repayment plan before you pay the bill for them. Triangle your child into your relationship with your spouse. If you and your spouse can't talk with each other, go to therapy; don't talk about your relationship with your spouse with your child. Many college-age students fail in school because they are preoccupied with worrying about their parents. Don't think your advice and approval is no longer needed or wanted. College-age youth still need guidance and direction from trusted adults. Remember what life was like when you were their age? They NEED you!