



10 WAYS TO TRICK YOUR TEEN INTO A HEALTHY, DRUG-FREE LIFESTYLE

It's a fact: **teens trick their parents** from time to time. Experts say it's normal for teens to stretch rules, take risks and try out some trickery (just think back to when you were a teen.) But there are some key things parents can do to keep their young tricksters safe and healthy. With Halloween around the corner, why not roll up your sleeves and do some productive tricking — and treating — of your own? Here are 10 ways parents can reduce teen mischief and encourage a healthy relationship with their teen on Halloween and beyond.

1. Trick Them Into Talking

Make **time to talk** with your teen every day, so it becomes routine. That way when you have an important topic to discuss, it will be more comfortable and flow more naturally. Chat it up regularly — about celebrities, classmates, the news or anything to help maintain open lines of communication.

"If you're thoughtful and open and expressive, and you've developed good communication with your kids all along, it's going to be an easier ride."

— Neil I. Bernstein, Ph.D., adolescent psychologist and author

2. Trick Them With Your Digital Savvy

Bone up on the latest technology and you'll gain a better understanding of your teen's world. Learn to use online social networks like Facebook and MySpace and status update services like Twitter. **Texting your teen** is a great non-confrontational way to check in, show your support and stay connected.

Surveys show that more than half of teens who text message think it has improved their relationship with their parents, and 51 percent of parents who text with their teens agree that they communicate more often.

[Source: Kelton Research, 2008 survey for Samsung Mobile]



3. Trick Them Into Taking Healthy Risks

It's natural for teens to want to take risks: **Teen brains** and bodies are bursting with energy and idealism — even if it doesn't always show. Urge your teen to take healthy risks; He may develop some valuable life skills in the process. First learn what your teen finds exciting and daring and then help him focus on some **healthy options**.

"I'd like to see every teen out in the wilderness, out at a summer camp, out on a ropes course, doing something that's scarier than what he might have chosen to do himself — 'cause he can respect that. And even if he has a safety line on him, the fact that he's out on a rope with a 40-foot drop or something, he's scared, and he's pushed. And I do think that takes up some of teenagers' risk-taking energy."

— Michael G. Thompson, Ph.D., psychologist, school consultant and author

4. Trick Them Into Telling You About Their Day

"How was your day?" "Fine." Sound familiar? To get your teen to open up to you, try asking specific, open-ended conversation-starters like these:

- *Did any of your classmates do anything funny?*
- *Tell me about what you read in class.*
- *Do you think math [or any subject] is too easy or too hard?*
- *What's the biggest difference between this year and last year?*
- *Who did you sit with at lunch?*
- *Can you show me something you learned (or did) today?*

[Source: Scholastic Parents]

5. Trick Them Into Staying Out of Trouble

Encourage your teen to join a club, play a sport or participate in community service — this will give her something structured to do afterschool as well as a wider circle of friends. There may be lots of healthy (and cheap!) opportunities right in your community like trying out for a sports team or auditioning for a play. Try getting ideas at the library, her school, or your place of worship.

"Kids in middle school can try a lot of new sports and activities and drama and music and lots of things that keep them very busy. A tired middle schooler is a low-risk middle schooler — so we want them to be busy and involved. And as we go along with them in those activities and participate in an appropriate way, they know we're right with them and they know that they're safe."

— Marybeth Hicks, motivational speaker and parenting author

6. Trick them Into Following Your Rules

Rules don't alienate kids. Rules about what's acceptable — from obeying curfews to calling in to tell you where they are — make children feel loved and secure. Explain that you **set limits** only because you care and not because you don't trust her. Make sure your teen knows your rules, and understands the consequences of breaking the rules. If she clearly sees the consequences, and views them as fair, she is more apt to follow the rules.

"We need to present limits as a ladder which a young person climbs on the way to becoming an independent, free adult."

— Neil I. Bernstein, Ph.D., adolescent psychologist and author



7. Trick Them Into Telling You The Truth

Always be honest with your teen, even when it comes to **answering difficult questions**. If your teen senses your genuine honesty, he will likely follow your example. Explain to your teen know that honesty is a highly-respected trait, one that requires courage and independent thought. Tell him that you value his honesty and are willing to listen without making judgments.

"Use an open-ended question that is not accusatory but alludes to a possible behavior such as 'Anything interesting happen at the party last night?'"

— Vanessa Van Petten, author, blogger, teen expert

8. Trick Them By Offering A Safety Plan

Imagine you're a teen and you've just done something really dumb like get drunk at a friend's house. Who are the last people on earth you'd want to find out? Your parents, right? A **safety plan** gets your teen past that fear by letting him know that you care more about him than about what he does. Even if you think he already knows how you feel, spell it out for him. Then lay out your plan. Here's one way to do it:

"Nothing in the world is more important to me than keeping you healthy and safe. That's one reason I don't want you to drink or do drugs. But if you ever find yourself in a bad situation — like, you get drunk at a party, or the person who's supposed to drive you home does — I want you to call me. I don't care what time it is. I'll come to pick you up and I won't ask any questions until the next day. Will you promise to do that for me?"

9. Trick Them Into Feeling Good About Themselves

Give your teen lots of praise and positive feedback. Teens need to hear the "good stuff" just like the rest of us. (And they'll eat up the extra attention, too.) They need to know you can still see beyond the things they do wrong from time to time. Catch them being good and always reward positive, responsible, mature behavior.

"After your teen finishes a task, or at least shows that he really tried, make sure you recognize his effort. That recognition really provides the motivation for kids to continue."

— Richard Catalano, Ph.D., Professor and Director of the Social Development Research Group, University of Washington's School of Social Work.

10. Treat Them With Love and Support

It's very important that teens feels supported at all times by their parent. Be sure to let your child know that he or she can always count on you and come to you for guidance.

- Reassure your child that she can confide in or seek advice from you when she's stressed or dealing with a personal issue.
- As frustrated as you may feel sometimes (let's face it, teens know how to push our buttons), try to speak from a place of love, caring and concern — and express these feelings to your teen.
- Remind your teen that the reason you're always talking with her and asking questions is because you love her and care about her and want her to be healthy and successful.
- Provide your teen with lots of hugs and kisses as well as an occasional sweet treat (like a Hershey's Kisses, for example.)

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