



# Involving Your Teen In Decision-Making

*A newsletter for parents of youth in Wisconsin*

## Issue 1: Getting started

“ You’re going to need the same skills when you go out into the so-called real world that you’re going to use when you’re debating with your parents.... And if your parents don’t involve you in decisions, you don’t learn those skills. ”

**Jon, 18**

“ I asked my 15-year-old daughter where she wanted to go on vacation. “London!” she said. I had been thinking of a camping trip in the North Woods or maybe driving to see old friends in Michigan – we can’t afford to go on a European vacation! Now she’s mad because we didn’t take her suggestion. I don’t know what I could have done better in that situation. ”

**Greg, father of two**

Parenting a teenager can have its ups and downs. A lot of parents struggle with their children’s growing independence, and some may worry that they’re losing touch. At the same time, most parents enjoy seeing their children grow into young adults with interests and personalities of their own. All parents hope their children will make responsible choices – while they’re teenagers and also when they’re older and living on their own.

This is the first in a series of newsletters designed to help you encourage good decision-making skills in the teenage members of your family. You have a very important role to play as your teenage child begins to develop the skills that will make him or her successful as an adult. By talking through big and small decisions among family members, parents can keep their teenagers involved in their families, help them develop critical skills along the way to responsible adulthood, and avoid a lot of unnecessary family conflict.

Teenagers are known for being adventurous. They’re trying out their new thinking skills and feeling the joy of independence. If they have the chance to practice decision-making skills at home and learn that their decisions have consequences, they’ll be ready when they have to make serious decisions outside of the home.

Over four issues of this newsletter, we will demonstrate how involving young people in decision-making benefits adults, young people, families, and communities.

# Parent-child decision-making: Everybody wins!

“ I would just tell parents: You listen to my opinions and then I'll listen to yours, and hopefully we both can make an agreement instead of having conflicts. ”

**Mia, 15**

## What to expect in future newsletters

Each issue in this series of newsletters will include quotes from Wisconsin teens and parents about their experiences with decision making, like you see above. Each issue will also include some suggestions, from Wisconsin teens and from our research, for how you might approach decision making with the teenager in your family. We will also recommend books, websites, and other resources you might find interesting, as you see on the next page.

This issue is about how adults benefit when they share decision-making with their children. Future issues will look at how young people benefit, how families benefit, and how communities benefit when young people are involved in important decisions. We will talk about how you can help your teen develop good decision making skills, how all the changes teenagers are going through affect their ability to make decisions, and how you can support your teenager to participate in community activities that will allow her or him to continue to practice decision making skills.

Involving all family members in decisions isn't just good for the kids. Here are a few reasons why talking about decisions with your kids will make *your* life easier and improve your relationship with your teenage child:

- ✓ You will be more likely to maintain a close relationship with your child if you provide her with opportunities to make her own decisions and contribute her opinion on important family matters. Better she takes her first moves towards independence with your assistance than in rebellion against you!
- ✓ You can be more confident that family rules will be followed, and planned activities will actually happen, when your child has helped to plan them.
- ✓ You are likely to have a closer relationship with your child if he sees that you trust him to make important decisions, and that you will not turn down every request he makes.
- ✓ You will develop your own skills in communicating and understanding how other people think.
- ✓ You will take “baby steps” towards being the parent of an independent young adult – it'll happen sooner than you think!
- ✓ You will better understand what life is like for your child and this will help you make parental decisions when you need to.
- ✓ You will have a better sense of your child's capabilities and decision making skills, and will know whether he's prepared to deal with a situation on his own.
- ✓ Last but not least, you may be pleasantly surprised by the ideas and insights your child brings to the table. You will be proud of the young person you're raising!

## How do you get started on involving your kids in decision making?

We talked to Wisconsin teens and got some tips about what parents should do – and shouldn't do – to get their input.

You might find the following guidelines helpful the next time a decision comes up and you think your teen might be able to help with the decision.

### Tips from teens

#### Pick the right time for a talk

Don't try to discuss a serious issue as your child runs out the door for school. On the other hand, a sit-down talk might be over the top for smaller decisions. Be sensitive to your teen's attention span and other demands on her time. Many parents find that car rides are a good opportunity to talk with their busy children.

#### Be ready to listen

Go into each conversation with an open mind and really listen to what your child says. (The next issue of this newsletter includes good listening techniques.)

#### Be clear about your intentions

Young people want to know how you plan to use the information and opinions they give you. Are they helping you choose between a small number of ideas? Or are you open to completely new suggestions?

#### Set a good example

Demonstrate to your child what responsible decision-making means. Talk through how you consider the various options. Your children are watching you and learning from your example, good or bad.

#### Encourage your child's skill development

Make a point to notice when your child exercises good judgement, lists "pros and cons" of a decision, or suggests a good solution to a family conflict. Your teenager is trying out new ways of thinking and solving problems. Your positive feedback will encourage him to remember those skills and use them in other situations.

#### Learn together

Even if those first attempts at conversations feel awkward, keep trying. You're learning new skills, too!

#### Continue to be "the parent"

Regardless of how much you involve your kids in decision-making, you are responsible for the health and safety of your children. Put down your foot when you need to, but talk it through with your family. Remember that decisions made by an authority figure are easier to accept – for all of us – when we understand the reasons behind them.

### Resources for parents



#### [www.FamilyTLC.net](http://www.FamilyTLC.net)

This website provides advice and activity suggestions for parents of kids of all ages. Enter your child's age and find a page of suggested activities (updated each month), or click on the "All About Kids" series of articles. They have some good articles under the "Pre-Teen" and "Teen" sections about raising responsible kids, negotiating family rules, and helping your kids make good decisions.

#### [www.cfw.tufts.edu](http://www.cfw.tufts.edu)

The Child and Family Webguide lists high-quality websites parents can use to learn more about parenting. Their section on "Parenting Teens" is comprehensive! Through some of the websites listed in the Webguide, you can learn more about the research that the advice in this newsletter is based on.

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Who calls the shots? You or your teen?	I decide alone	We discuss, then I decide	We decide together	He/she decides alone
What to wear to school What to wear to a party Choosing classes in high school Where to go on a family vacation Setting curfew How much time to spend taking care of younger family members Buying a new TV Moving to a new home When to get a driver's license Who to go out with on Friday night What to have for dinner Joining the school basketball team or trying out for a play				

For each situation described above, whose decision is it? A parent, a teen, or a parent and teen together? Check the boxes to show your answers, then ask your teen do the same. Talk about the differences in your answers and why you each answered the way you did. Is there a pattern to your responses? To your child's responses?

There are no right or wrong answers when it comes to questions about involving teens in family decisions. Every family has to decide what kind of decisions kids can help with, which ones they can make on their own, and which ones are up to parents to decide. All of the situations listed here are ones where some families use shared decision-making with teenagers.



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