

# SMART LOVE<sup>®</sup>

## FAMILY SERVICES

### SMART AND LOVING SOLUTIONS



## Teens are People Too: How to Help Your Teen Be Happy and Successful in Life

All parents want to raise children to become happy and successful adults who make healthy and constructive choices when you are no longer around to guide them. What are the most effective ways to foster teens' healthy development? Smart Love is an effective guide to help parents strike the right balance between regulating your teen's behavior and maintaining a positive relationship with him/her. The most powerful force impacting the kind of life your child will ultimately have is how you treat him/her and the degree to which your child feels valued by you. Building a positive, close relationship with your teen is the foundation for their happiness and success. The deep inner well-being that this creates helps your teen make good choices for themselves in all aspects of life because it feels good. They want to take care of themselves just like you take care of them.

Teens are people too in that they have thoughts, feelings and ideas that are just as complex as adults. If treated respectfully, teens are more able to discover who they are and feel they can be themselves, rather than respond to who parents or other adults want them to be. Parents may feel a need to shape or control teens, but teens will develop a much healthier autonomy when given the space and proper guidance to do so.

To connect positively, show your teen that you enjoy and want to spend time with him/her. Meet and get to know your child's friends (think of fun ways, such as ordering

in pizza for your child's group of friends). Make it routine to ask where your teen is when he/she is outside of the home. Texting can be a helpful way to stay in touch with your teen. Even simple things like greeting your child in the morning with a smile, makes a positive impact that builds over time. Notice and comment on your teen's strengths. Be sensitive and open to discussing and listening to questions about sexuality, relationships, and your teen's ideas and thoughts about him/herself. Be available to brainstorm together ways to solve problems—give choices and offer compromises.

When confronted by a situation with your teen where you need to respond and offer regulation, keep in mind that *how* you respond impacts their inner well-being and sense of self-worth. A good place to start is to first try to find out what else might be going on in your child's life. If you can figure out the feelings and reasons behind the behavior and not just focus on the behavior, your child will feel less criticized and more that you are interested in helping him/her. Research strongly supports the idea that teens feel much more open to their parents' guidance when they feel supported and not criticized or controlled by their parents. For example, your teen might be upset due to school and relationship stress and just needs some TLC from you to feel better. The kinder you are, the more likely teenagers will re-engage with their own desire to make good decisions for themselves. Give your child room to tell you all of his/her feelings

and just *listen*. Try to understand without judging even if your teen has a different point of view.

Sometimes parents express concern that if they consistently support their teen, their child will develop an unhealthy dependence. It is the opposite. When parents meet their teens' emotional needs, they foster a genuine type of independence that is not dependent on their success at getting what they want. While your child will continue to turn to you for guidance, your teen will increasingly be able to take care of his/her own needs. You and your child will be setting the stage for a friendship of mutual respect, love and enjoyment to last the rest of your lives.

### What can I do when my teen is struggling and unhappy?

- Be available to truly understand his/her experience rather than dismiss or make assumptions
- Make caring statements and show an interest in hearing his/her feelings
- Listen, even if you disagree; teens have their own minds that need to be valued
- Don't withdraw your care when teen is acting out. Be more available
- Offer to spend time together doing enjoyable relationship-oriented activities
- Even if your teen rejects you, know he/she still needs you. Give them space but also let your child know you are there for them.

The Smart Love Approach was developed by Martha Heineman Pieper, Ph.D., and William J. Pieper, M.D., and is described in their book *Smart Love*. The Natalie G. Heineman Smart Love Preschool offers classes for 3–5 yr. olds, Parent and Tot classes for children 12–36 mos.+, and Mom and Baby Group. Smart Love Family Services provides counseling for children and families based on the Piepers' therapeutic approach, Inner Humanism<sup>®</sup>. Parenting programs include private parent coaching, educational seminars (co-sponsored by the Intrapsychic Humanism Society) and publications. Copyright 2012 Smart Love Family Services, an Illinois-based 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization.