

# THE TIME BETWEEN ESTABLISHING A CURFEW & YOUR KIDS COMING HOME LATE.



Lots of parents are afraid to set limits. They think it will build a wall between them and their teen. In truth, limits actually show your teen that you care. The tricky part is finding a balance between your need for control and your teen's need for independence. The team at Partnership for Drug-Free Kids provides helpful tips for parents.

## Every Teen is Different. Figure Out Where Yours Needs Limits.

Some of our teens need a lot of structure to be successful; others don't. Depending on your teen's personality and routine, you might consider setting boundaries that spell out:

- What they can and can't do after school\*.
- When they need to do homework.
- When they can use the computer and what she can use it for.
- When and how long they can use the phone.
- When they need be home at night on weekends.
- What kinds of parties they can go to and who she can go with.
- When and why they can use a car and ride in one.



*\*This is prime time for experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Having an adult around during these hours is one of the most effective ways to prevent drug use.*

## Let Your Teen Help Create the Rules. (They'll Work Better.)

Teens are much more likely to obey rules and limits that they help to create. Work with your teen to figure out what you both can live with. Be open-minded about her goals and needs — and crystal clear about yours. Remember, each rule or limit has to:

- **Work for both of you.** If they have an after-school job, setting a rule that says homework has to be done by dinnertime isn't practical. Neither is giving them until 8 a.m. Find a middle ground.
- **Make your expectations clear.** Saying, "Be civil to people" is vague. Saying, "Don't yell, swear, hit, or break things" spells out what you expect.

## Work Together on Consequences, Too.

There's got to be a price for stepping over the line. Otherwise, why would a teen pay attention to limits? Let your teen help you define the consequences. Here are a few questions to keep in mind as you go:

- **Does the punishment fit the crime?** Grounding for a week may be too harsh when they are 20 minutes late for dinner, but reasonable when missed curfew by two hours.
- **Can you enforce the consequence?** If your teen stays home alone while you work a night shift, saying they have to be in bed by 8 p.m. isn't very enforceable.

## Work Together on Consequences, Too. (Continued)

- Is the consequence clear? Saying, “If you miss curfew, you can’t use the car.” is vague. Saying, “For every 30 minutes you’re late, you lose your right to use the car for one day.” makes the cost clear.

As a wrap up, make sure you’re both on the same page. Ask your teen to say each limit and consequence out loud. You may even want to put the details in writing.

## Prepare Yourself. She Will Cross a Line. It’s Only Natural.

All teens make mistakes. That’s how they learn. And when your teen does, you’re bound to be mad. But keep your emotions in check. Avoid making empty threats or you’ll lose credibility. Take time to cool off, then calmly tell her about your disappointment, anger, or frustration. (Your feelings can be a very powerful motivator for her.) And in the end, remember your agreement — only enforce the consequences you talked about, no surprises. When things are going well — which will be most of the time — be sure to tell her you noticed. Everyone likes a pat on the back, a word of thanks, or a compliment. Who knows? She might do the same for you some day.

## The Basics of Monitoring

The idea of “monitoring” may sound sinister, but it’s actually a very simple idea that leads to great things: knowing where your child is at all times (especially after school), knowing his friends, and knowing his plans. By staying in-the-know about your child’s daily schedule, you’re taking an important step in keeping him free from issues of substance use. Kids who are not regularly monitored are four times more likely to use drugs, than kids who are.

## Strike a Balance

Because monitoring conflicts with your child’s desire to be independent, they are likely to resist attempts to find out the details of their daily whereabouts. Don’t let this deter you. They may accept the idea more easily if you present it as a means of ensuring safety or interest in who they are and what they like to do, rather than as a means of control.



*The most important time of day to monitor is after school. Kids are at the greatest risk for using drugs or alcohol during these hours. Call your child’s school to find out about adult-supervised activities they can take part in during these hours. Encourage them to get involved with youth groups, art or music programs, organized sports, community service or academic clubs. Follow up with your child to make sure they are actually going to the program chosen.*

