



Christmas Conversations

By the time children reach teenage years, Santa's part in Christmas has been relegated to a fairy tale and the dilemma of whether to leave apples or carrots for the reindeers has been settled for the last time.

The Christmas holidays do however still provide plenty of dilemmas for parents of teenagers. Some of these include:

- How much supervision do teenagers need?
- How do we strike the right balance between insisting on family time and allowing our children to spend time with friends?

The transition to adolescence involves a delicate renegotiation of the parent-child relationship and this is especially true during school holidays when limits are often challenged. Parents are gradually handing over greater freedom and more responsibility in a 'give-and-take' process that requires a great deal of thought on the part of the parent. It isn't easy but there are a few factors that can help guide this process:-

- Aim for influence not control. Create a conversation around the big issues and brainstorm ideas rather than demanding obedience. If the teen wants to spend an hour with a friend on Christmas Day, be creative about how this can be achieved whilst still fulfilling family obligations.
- What is negotiable and what is not? If a teen wants to stay at a friend's house an hour later than planned, he calls (or sends a text) rather than simply not arriving home. It may be better to drive him home rather than have a row over his safety at night.
- Give a little freedom at a time. The first time a teen begs to go into the city on the train with friends, collect her on the way back and offer her friend a lift too. That way she gets used to responsibility in manageable portions.

Overall, stay calm and use communication as the tool to help both parent and teen feel heard and understood. In this way, the relationship you build over the holidays will be a great strength for when the new school term begins.

We provide free, confidential, professional counselling to families across NSW, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you would like to discuss your relationship with your adolescent with a counsellor or discuss any other parenting issue, please call 1300 1300 52 or visit our website www.parentline.org.au