

## How to engage today's teens and help them mature

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### Connecting with Generation iY

*As parents, we want to protect our kids but we also have to allow them to mature and become responsible adults. However, the current high school dropout rate and general disconnect with today's teenagers has left some parents wondering how to engage their children, teach them to make mature decisions and help prepare them for the real world.*



After a decade of improvements, the high school graduation rate in America has stalled out in recent years. A national report from [Education Week](#) and the Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center in 2010 found that the nation's graduation rate had dropped for the second consecutive year. The research indicated that three out of every 10 students in U.S. public schools fail to finish high school with a diploma. In real numbers, that amounts to 1.3 million students

every year -- more than 7,200 students lost every day.

#### Gen iY

We consulted Tim Elmore, a speaker and author of more than 25 books who has a special expertise with what he calls "Generation iY" -- current teenagers. Elmore founded the international non-profit [Growing Leaders](#) to develop young leaders who will transform society.

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"For a majority of students, dropping out is not a result of being unable to do school work," explains Elmore. "Most of them are not slow, troubled or bad kids. They are bored. Teaching methods and school systems do not connect with many of the students from Generation iY (born since 1990). They've been conditioned to learn through uploading their own thoughts, to engage in right-brained activities, while schools are forced to download lectures, frequently in a

left-brained fashion. There is a clash between learning style and teaching pedagogy."

Though some troubled teens are lacking support at home, many others are getting too much.

"When we see academically troubled students, it's usually a result of either abandonment or abundance," says Elmore "They've either had no direction from home, or parents have done too much for them. Today's kids may never know the innocence and the exploration that we recall from our childhood. Parents rarely let their kids walk to school or use public transportation, and they schedule their day full with piano, soccer, ceramics and gymnastics. Our focus on safety is understandable, but it disables our children from taking calculated risks and learning to fail, both of which help people mature. All the activities we provide are great, but it means all their time is monitored and structured. They often don't know what to do with free time. They fail to learn to resolve conflict, think for themselves or do real-life problem solving. It's all virtual— or artificial—maturity.

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"Sadly, while our intentions are good, we leave kids without the tools to self-regulate. This is why the average college student is in touch with their mom or dad 11 times a day, and why 80 percent of students return home after college. They are unable to be autonomous adults. While they usually want the autonomy, they may not be ready for the responsibility. This is where our work as parents begins."

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### **Rules of engagement**

Parents, teachers and caregivers need to engage teens without over-scheduling them in structured activities. The key is to create an environment where they can think for themselves, learn to solve problems, make mature decisions and take responsibility for their actions.

**Learn to say "no."** If we allow them, our kids will participate in every sport and extracurricular activity possible. It's your job as a parent to know when to say "no." Teach your children to embrace unstructured time.

**Disconnect.** For your children to mature, they need to take time away from the computer (or TV) screen. Engage them in fun physical activities, meaningful events and face-to-face time with real people.

**Eat dinner as a family.** Eating dinner together as a family provides an opportunity to learn more about what's happening in your teen's life. You might discover problems he/she is having or learn more about your child's interests.

**Set a good example.** If you often yell in anger, blow off work when you are tired and overspend on your budget, you can't expect your teen to establish a strong work ethic and make the right decisions. Practice what you preach.

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### **Authentic maturity**

For teens who don't have the best role models at home, it can be much more difficult for them to mature into responsible adults. However, they can teach themselves how to move toward mature adulthood. Elmore believes all teens need to learn the seven marks of maturity.

A mature person is:

- Able to keep long-term commitments
- Unshaken by flattery or criticism
- Possesses a spirit of humility
- Makes decisions based on character, not feeling
- Expresses gratitude consistently
- Knows how to prioritize others before themselves
- Seeks wisdom before acting

"Once they recognize what they need, teens should seek out mentors who model the way for them, demonstrating what authentic maturity looks like," says Elmore. "Students do what students see. Caring adults recognize that while children rarely listen to their elders, they seldom fail to emulate them."

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Article may be found at: <http://www.sheknows.com/parenting/articles/847759/how-to-engage-todays-teens-and-help-them-mature>