

Free Time and Teenagers

Ing. Pavla Melecká

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Free time and teenagers

VIDEO:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI50I0GV3gE>

SOURCE:

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Key points

- Teenagers need free time to explore interests, unwind or be with friends.
- Enjoying activities with teenage children is a great way to build your relationship.
- Some rules about free time with friends can help to keep children safe.
- Finding a balance between being interested in your child's activities and being 'in her/his face' can be tricky.
- Solo free time is important too, so long as it's balanced with other activities.

How teenagers spend free time

- All teenagers are different, but many enjoy spending their free time doing things like shopping, going to parties, being with friends, gaming and using social media, texting, watching movies, reading and going to the park.
- Teenagers are also spending an increasing amount of their free time in structured **extracurricular activities**

Free time activities with parents

- Doing something one-on-one with parents is a great way to **stay connected** with their teenage child.
- They could go shopping, go to a movie or concert, cook a meal together, look through family photos, or work on a project like redecorating the child's room. It just depends on what interests they have.
- Parents might need to try a range of activities before they find one both like.

Free time activities with parents

- These activities might not happen spontaneously – parents might need to **plan to spend some time together**.
- If it is a new thing, the child might take a bit of encouraging before she/he is keen. If this is an issue, the parent can consider inviting one or two of the child's friends along as well.
- If they spend time together often enough, the child will probably build up more enthusiasm.

Free time activities with the whole family

Some activities the whole family could do:

- watching a family-friendly movie
- playing a favourite game or activity at a local park, like soccer or frisbee
- planning a special meal with everyone suggesting a dish
- planning a holiday
- going for a walk or a bike ride.

Free time activities with the whole family

- If you've got teenagers and younger children, you could **have a family meeting to brainstorm activities to enjoy as a family.**
- You could make a couple of lists – activities to do together, and activities that only some of you will do.

Free time with friends

- Children want to do things with their friends. Agreeing on some [rules](#) can help keep children safe when they are out.

Information:

- How much do the parents need to know about where the child is going, and who with?
- What details are OK for your child to keep to herself?
- Can she/he call you if her plans change?
- Will the child leave his/her phone on while she/he is out?
- Monitoring the child is OK, as long as we're just trying to make sure your child is safe.
- As the child gets older, parents can reduce their supervision and involvement in his activities.

Free time with friends

Open house:

- Getting to know your child's friends shows your child you understand how important her/his friendships are.
- One way to do this is to encourage your child to have friends over and give them a space in your home.
- You could think about how open you want your home to be:
 - Will there be a curfew?
 - Will you provide meals, snacks and drinks?
 - Does your child need to take responsibility for having friends over – for example, tidying up the kitchen or family room afterwards?

Free time with friends

Money :

- some of the activities the child is interested in cost money.
- You might talk with your child about what activities you're willing to pay for, how often and how much.
- You could also talk to your child about **pocket money**.
- Consider how much is fair in your family.
- Can extra jobs earn extra money?

Free time for teenagers on their own

- Sometimes your child will just want to spend time by himself, not doing very much – it's partly about recharging his mental batteries.
- Solo free time is fine, if it's not all the time and is balanced with spending time with friends and family.
- It's also OK for your child to feel bored sometimes! Being bored can motivate your child to find something creative or new to fill her time.

Free time for teenagers on their own

Screen time

- Your child might spend some of his solo free time watching TV, using a computer or tablet, playing video games, and using his phone.
- Healthy screen time for teenagers is about choosing quality programs and apps and developing healthy screen habits. It also includes limits on screen time (to balance screen time with other activities)

Extracurricular activities

Key points:

- Extracurricular activities let children pursue interests, meet new people and develop new skills.
- Some teenagers need a bit of help to find extracurricular activities that suit them.
- It's important for teenagers to balance extracurricular activities and other areas of their lives.

Extracurricular activities

- Extracurricular activities can be just about anything your child enjoys outside school e. g. sport, drama, Scouts and Guides, hobbies like craft or photography
- They can also be things you've encouraged your child to do, like language classes, music, debating, religious instruction, swimming, or paid and unpaid jobs.

What teenagers get from extracurricular activities

Taking part in extracurricular activities can:

- give your child a chance to try a range of activities and find out what he's good at
- give your child a sense of achievement and boost his self-esteem and [confidence](#)
- promote good [mental health](#) and a sense of belonging
- keep your child busy with healthy and positive challenges like sport or community activity
- help your child learn to handle [responsibility](#), take initiative and solve problems
- help your child learn to overcome tough times.

Encouraging children to try extracurricular activities

- Some teenagers are keen but just **need a bit of help to get started with extracurricular activities**. Parents can talk with them to work out what they are interested in, talk to other families about what other teenagers do, search online. They can also ask the child's school about its clubs and societies.
- Some children might need **help to ease into a new group of people** (if they don't know anyone there). Perhaps your child has a friend who'd like to do the activity with him. Or you could arrange for him to meet someone who already does the activity.
- Your child could also **start an activity gradually**. For example, if your child's ultimate goal is to be on the stage with a local theatre group, she/he could start by working as a stage hand.

Encouraging children to try extracurricular activities

- Not all teenagers are into extracurricular activities.
- It's OK if your child doesn't do many, or any, extracurricular activities. He might feel that he gets to try and enjoy plenty of things at school.
- Extracurricular activities are voluntary. If your child doesn't want to do an activity, he won't enjoy it and won't benefit from it. Making him do it will only lead to tension.

Finding the right balance with extracurricular activities

- Balancing work and fun is a challenge for everyone.
- If you're worried that **your child has taken on too many extracurricular activities**, there are some **signs** that things are out of balance for him/her, e. g. **being tired, grumpy or stressed and having trouble sleeping.**

Let the child work out priorities (questions to ask):

- What would I like to do more or less of?
- What stuff is the most important to me?
- What's important to us as a family?
- What do I have to do, like schoolwork?

Finding the right balance with extracurricular activities

Thinks to consider:

- **Time away from home:** how many nights does your child come home after 8.30 or 9 pm? How long is she/he out for on weekends? Can she/he contribute to life at home, like doing his chores?
- **Balance of activities:** how much sleep is your child getting? Does she/he have any down time? Can she/he get her homework done on time? Does she/he have time for friends? Is she/he spending lots of time in singing lessons and tennis practice, for example, at the expense of school or socialising?
- **Behaviour:** does your child seem happy? Is he irritable? Does he seem stressed a lot of the time?
- **Impact on the family:** how many family meals are missed/disrupted by your child's activities? Is this a problem for your family? How often does she/he miss family activities? Do your child's activities mean other family members miss out on doing things?

Community work

Key points:

- Getting involved in local community activities or volunteering can boost teenagers' confidence and self-esteem and help them build skills.
- You can get your child started by taking part as a family or by helping your child find activities that interest her.
- It doesn't matter what teenagers do for their communities. Any involvement is good!

Community work

- Your child can learn about civic responsibility and be active in your community by:
- Joining a scouting group or a local environmental or clean-up group
- helping with a primary school play, or coordinating or coaching junior sport
- setting up an arts space for the community or getting involved in youth radio
- being part of a youth advisory group through the local council
- promoting causes – for example, environmental issues, refugee rights, bushfire recovery and charities.

Community work

- Your child might be interested in online civic or community activities – for example, an online campaign to save a local area of parkland.
- Online community involvement can motivate teenagers to get involved in face-to-face community activities.