

TELEPHONES

Do you feel like your child spends too much time on the phone? Are they on the phone when you feel they should be doing their homework? Is your phone always busy? Every parent grapples with these questions.

Teenagers have to deal with many issues as they grow, from physical changes that occur with puberty to trying to figure out who they are. Friends can help a teenager make sense of what is happening to them and to help them feel normal. The telephone is one way they can keep in touch with their friends.

Telephone use is one example of the need for clear expectations with your teenager, and to negotiate with your teenager about these expectations. It is best to do this before problems occur.

Here are some ideas for helping parents deal with the issues of increased phone use.

- Have a family rule that everyone must tell others when they expect to be on the phone a long time.
- Negotiate times for using the phone.
- Set limits on the length of calls and when the phone is available for your teenager's use.
- Having a shared phone line can encourage co-operation among family members. However, if this causes too much conflict consider a dedicated teenager's line. If you install a separate line have clear rules about its use.
- Older teenagers can pay for some of the phone bill – perhaps for any long distance or mobile calls they make. This will give them a taste of the responsibility they will have when they leave home.

Remember, sometimes there is a need to be flexible. Remind yourself that a healthy part of growing up is about separating from parents and developing a group of your own friends. Until teenagers can drive or move out of home, the telephone is an important way to keep in touch.

Prepared by the Parenting Research Centre

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