

HANGING OUT

Are you worried about what your teenager is up to when you're not around? Don't like it when they are just 'hanging out' with their friends? Concerned that they are doing things that may be dangerous or illegal?

Hanging out refers to the unstructured time that teenagers spend out in public. Time when they are not expected to be doing things such as homework, playing sport or other activities.

Hanging out with friends and 'doing nothing' is typical and enjoyable for teenagers. Think of it as good practice for learning to cope without adult direction and to develop autonomy. However, you still need to know where they are, who they're with, or what time they'll be home: even when your teenager is 'just hanging out'.

It's important for teenagers to have time when they are busy in planned activities, but also time when they have nothing planned. The challenge is to get the balance right. Too much structured time and activities may lead your teenager to rebel. With too little structured time the risk is your teenager may become bored and get into mischief.

Here are some ideas that might help reduce the risk of your child getting into trouble when they hang out with their friends.

- Encourage your teenager to get involved in a range of structured out of school hours activities, but don't force them. Forcing them can cause more problems.
- Keep track of your teenager as much as possible when they are not with you or other adults you trust. If you are worried about where they are and who they are with, discuss this with them. Keeping track will help you work out when the balance between structured and unstructured time is right.
- Let your teenager have more freedom gradually. This teaches them how to take control of their own lives. This can also help you and your teenager build trust.
- Continue to have rules, and give consequences when these are broken. Setting limits will make it clear to your teenager what is expected and acceptable.
- Know who your teenager's friends are and be friendly towards them.

Prepared by the Parenting Research Centre

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