

Top 13

Tips for Parents

Your Teen had an abundance of expert advice that we couldn't pack into our feature on popularity. Here are 13 additional tips:

- 1. Accept that social issues exist.** For teens, every aspect of their identity is tied to their social life. Even activities that seem unrelated to friends, like sports or academics, affect their social standing.
- 2. Understand that everything feels bigger to teens.** Teens have heightened emotional responses. You may feel protective and inclined to react. Instead, support your teens by helping them work out their own problems and teaching them to take challenges in stride.
- 3. Appreciate your teen's social savvy.** Teens likely understand their social world better than you. For example, you may encourage your teen to be friends with a particular kid, but your teen might know that that kid is dancing to a drummer that won't please you.
- 4. Acknowledge your social vision.** If your teen likes his or her friends and they are a positive peer group, you should not be disappointed if they are not the group you would choose. Your teen does not need to feel your frustration because they didn't make the "in" group.
- 5. Define the elements of a good friendship.** Help your teen understand that friendship includes kindness. When teens worry about popularity, kindness can go out the window. Friendships can be one-

sided, where one teen tries hard to please a friend and the more popular friend takes advantage of that.

- 6. Encourage healthy friendships.** Often, teens put themselves on the periphery of the popular kids, hoping to get included. Encourage your teen to avoid these situations.
- 7. Sympathize when your teen says, "I want to be popular."** First, offer sympathy, but next, remind them about the importance of genuine friends versus being popular.
- 8. Empathize when your teen feels mistreated.** First offer empathy, but next offer coping tools, like ignoring the insult or addressing it with a short comment like, "Leave it alone."
- 9. Intervene with bullying.** Bullying—or even teasing—that negatively impacts your teen is different than the growing pains of fitting in. You should take bullying seriously and address it. (For more on this topic, go to yourteenmag.com/2010/10/advice-from-two-experts-2.)
- 10. Identify dangerous situations that require parental intervention.** If your teen is hanging with a tough crowd, you can say, "It's not productive and you are placing yourself in an unsafe situation. Why are you making those choices?" You should also try to understand why your teen is making poor choices.

- 11. Don't impose arbitrary limits that may hurt your teen socially.**

Don't set your teen up for teasing because you made an arbitrary rule, for example, no shaving until 10th grade. Look at your limits and talk to other parents to understand age-appropriate norms.

- 12. Set limits for use of technology.**

Even though computers and smart phones are essential in today's social world, you can still have house rules, like no phone at the dinner table or in the bedroom at night. But, if you don't allow certain technology at all, you will impact your child's ability to participate in today's world.

- 13. Recognize the downside of popularity.**

Popularity, particularly in middle school, is a double-edged sword. Kids who are popular in middle school also tend to be more likely to engage in risky behavior, like substance abuse and skipping school.

