VERMONT Consultation & Psychiatry Access PROGRAM

Supporting Pediatric and Perinatal Providers

CAREGIVERS GUIDE

SPECIAL TIME WITH TEENS

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Spending **regular, intentional time together** is an important way for caregivers to stay connected with their teens. Building positive shared experiences can strengthen the caregiver-teen relationship and make it easier to navigate times of stress, disagreement, or behavioral challenges. Regular connection can also help teens feel supported and create opportunities to develop positive coping and communication skills together.

Make it regular and protect the time. Ideally, schedule time together daily or weekly. It can be as short as 15 minutes. Choose a time that is realistic and sustainable, put it on the calendar, and minimize distractions when you can.

Let your teen take the lead. Whenever possible, let your teen choose an activity that you can both enjoy. It does not need to cost money or be elaborate, and it should not be focused on chores, homework, or other responsibilities.

Follow your teen's interests. Tailor the activity to your teen's unique interests, strengths, abilities, and preferences. The goal is connection, not choosing the "perfect" activity.

Think beyond face-to-face conversation. Some teens, particularly neurodivergent teens, may connect more comfortably while doing something alongside a caregiver rather than sitting down specifically to talk. Interaction is important, but it can happen naturally while you are engaged in another activity together.

IDEAS FOR TIME TOGETHER

PARALLEL ACTIVITIES	MORE INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES
» Go for a walk, run, or hike	» Make art or do a craft
» Attend a community event	» Take a class together, online or in person
» Plant or tend a garden	» Read the same book or comic and discuss it
» Go for a drive and listen to a favorite playlist	» Have your teen teach you a skill or tell you about something they love
» Work on separate activities in the same space while talking about your day	» Volunteer together for a cause you both care about

Be flexible and keep coming back to it. Life happens. If you miss your usual time together, that is okay. Reschedule when you can and continue building the routine.

A note about language: If “special time” does not feel natural for your family or your teen, call it something else, such as “dedicated time,” “quality time,” or simply “our time.” What matters is creating regular opportunities to connect.

ADAPTED FROM: *Seattle Children’s PALS “Family Special Time” handout.*

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