

How to get Teens to Stick to the Covid 19 Restrictions: A Guide for Parents

It can be a real challenge for parents to get their Teenagers to follow the Covid 19 restrictions by staying in and away from people that are not in their family. It was all such a sudden change when the restrictions came in that a lot of people (including teenagers) had a hard time coming to terms with the reality of it. Change is hard for everyone but particularly Teenagers so it's really about coming up with a 'new normal' that keeps the family and community safe and alive.

Parents Plus (www.parentsplus.ie) uses this approach to solve problems with teenagers or children as **having a Plan of Action is always the best place to start**. I've followed the steps here and included lots of ideas that parents have found to help - every family is different so what is good for one might not work for another so pick what you think would be best. This said, it takes time to create new habits and routines so give it a go and stick with your plan – Teens will often resist the change but once they get into the habit of it; it will all become easier.

Step 1: Be Clear on What the Problem is

Teenagers going out to meet their friends and then possibly getting the virus and passing it onto other people in the family and the community. Younger people might not show symptoms of the virus so they could be spreading it without even realising. This could have really terrible consequences for some people.

Check that everyone agree on what the problem is as people might be thinking it is different things. It's important to be on the same page!

Step 2: Tune in....

What is going on for the Teen?

These things are not true of all teenagers, but they are quite normal at their stage of development:

- Teenagers live in the here and now and don't really consider the future so they may not have fully get the seriousness of the situation.

- **Rebelling:** Teenagers are pulling away from their parents as they work out who they are and are forming their own identity. This sometimes involves them doing the opposite to what their parents want. This is why negotiating with Teens is really important – They are more likely to get on board if they feel heard and get something in the agreement.
- **Ego:** Teenagers can act like the world revolves around them and have a hard time considering others
- **Peer Pressure:** Friends and peers are really important to teenagers as well as those they might ‘fancy’!

Other things that might influence their behaviour are:

- A negative atmosphere in the house – maybe it’s not a place they want to be
- A negative relationship with their parents – Teens tend not to work with their parents if they do not have a good relationship some of the time
- They don’t understand the situation or the consequences .. they haven’t properly talked to anyone about it.

What is going on for the parent?

- How are you feeling? Stressed, annoyed, frustrated
- Are you holding resentment to the Teen that is affecting the relationship? Try and let this go and consider what is going on for the Teen. As parents we might have been similar when we were that age.
- **What has worked so far? What has not worked so far? This is key information to coming up with a solution**

Step 3: Think about Possible Solutions

Now that you have a clear understanding of the problem as well as why people in the family are behaving the way they are, the next thing is to come up with some ideas of what could work in keeping Teenagers in and away from people not in their family. Divide this into two parts.

1: The Prevention Plan: What can you do to prevent the problem happening in the first place?

2: The Plan for What are you going to do there and then when the problem happens (i.e. They want to go out and meet their friends)?

Please see lots of ideas to put in the plan in the next 2 pages!

1. The Prevention Plan

Be clear on what you want and say it in as few words as possible – say something like *“I am worried when you go out as you could bring the virus back to us and some of us could get really sick and even die”*. Be calm but serious. Don't be longwinded or get into an 'over and back' argument as then the main message gets lost.

Talk about it with your Teens – Remember Teenagers are unlikely to talk to parents if they are negative or critical. Start by hearing what they think about it (really listen and avoid interrupting) - say you understand where they are coming from and then say your point of view.

If it gets into an argument or becomes negative, they are unlikely to take your point on board so be careful of that. If this happens just repeat what you want to see happen and leave those words as they are.

Problem Solve and Negotiate The steps to this are: 1) Really hear what they think about the problem then say what you think 2) Come up with possible solutions (e.g. ways of keeping in touch with friends online) 3) Pick what ones you think would work best and try and make sure your Teen feels heard and that their opinion is part of it all. This approach is really helpful for the Teen who hates feeling controlled and does the opposite to what their parents want as a result. Taking their ideas on board takes that 'controlled feeling' away.

Keep a good relationship – Teenagers are much more likely to work with their parents if they have a good relationship with them some of the time. The way you build this is spending time together that you both enjoy that is free of criticism or direction (e.g. baking, watching a programme, laughing, chatting, playing a game, going for a walk). 10 minutes a day can make a massive difference. If they end up storming off or it turns into an argument – that is ok, you still got some time.

Notice the Good they Do and tell them when they do well. This also keeps the good relationship which makes it more likely that Teens will work with their parents. If they do stay in be sure to say something like *“I know this is really hard on you but I do appreciate you staying in”*. If you want to get a Teen to do something, it is 5 times more effective to notice when they do it compared to criticising or giving out when they don't do it.

Set Clear Rules that they know about in advance even if you are pretty sure they will ignore them. Rules should be clear and in as few words as possible 'The rule is we have to stay in and only go out with the people in our family'. You can then repeat this rule in the same words every time they are looking to go out and it becomes really clear. Repetition means it sinks in.

Link Rules to Rewards or Consequences: Think about phones, Xboxes, playstations, wifi, money as privileges that they earn or lose depending on behaviour. If they get 2 hours phone or technology time a day or 10 euro pocket money a week; maybe this is dependent on them staying in. They don't get it if they go out. Be careful not to take everything away as then there is nothing to left to lose... so losing 2 euro pocket money every day they go out or half an hour phone or tech time is more effective than taking it all. Sometimes consequences can backfire though, especially if there is not a good relationship between the parent and the teen.

Other ideas for Rewards This can be really effective in guiding the behaviour you want from your teen – What is it that they really want? Driving lessons, gym membership, a trip to Tayto Park, tickets to a concert – say that you understand how hard this is on them but that you're willing to get something they really want for them when this is all over if they stick to the rules (allow for a few slipups as we all have them).

Self-care for Parents. Think about yourself as a battery – what gives you energy and makes you feel better (nice food, sitting in the sun, chats with friends, a good programme on tv, a walk, mindfulness)? Then think what drains your energy (a lot in this current situation)! It makes sense that you need enough energy in your battery to get through all this so make sure you take time to look after yourself and fill it up!

2. The Plan for What you will do 'There and Then' if Teens want to go out

Repeat the main message of "I am worried when you go out as you could bring the virus back to us and some of us could get really sick and even die". Remember **be clear on what you want and say it in as few words as possible**. Leave those important words for what they are

Use 'I Statements' not 'You Statements'. Teens (and people) normally get resentful and won't listen when they are told things that start with a 'you' – e.g. 'You don't care' or 'you are so selfish'... they just get peoples' backs up.

I statements are a better way of getting your message across as no one can argue with your feelings.

It works this way:

I feel (name emotion) **when you** (name behaviour) **because** (say why).

For example:

I feel worried when you go out with your friends because you could bring the virus back to our home and an older person could get it

Remind the Teen of the agreement you came up with and why it is important to stay in. **Remind them of the consequences** if they do go out. Make sure to follow through on the consequences if needed.

The Gardai can fine people so the Teen should own and take responsibility for that one.

Try to avoid getting into an argument or conflict. Simply stay calm and strong and remind them of the rule that they need to stay in to keep everyone in the family safe.

If emotions (anger, stress or upset) are getting the better of you or your Teen – **Press the Pause Button** – and take some time out before trying to sort it out.

Everything is easier to sort out when people are calm rather than 'in the height of it' as we are much more reasonable then.

Be Positive: Even though it's likely parents will feel very annoyed and frustrated, teens are more likely to work with their parents if they are positive and understand where they are coming from. Always start with something positive and they are then more likely to listen to what you say next: You could say

"I know this is really hard for you and that you miss you friends"

"You stayed in last week when the others were out and I really appreciated that" (**Reminding them of a time they did well can be very effective in getting them to work with you**)

Hear the Teen out and what they have to say even if you don't agree. Sometimes letting them get what they have to say off their chest helps them work it out in their heads and then they might be more reasonable then. Often the frustration from being in an argument is not that you didn't get your own way, it's that you didn't get heard.

Make sure to repeat your clear rule or I statement at the end of listening though just to make sure than main message does not get lost.

Parents work together – It's much better if parents and other adults in the house are on the same page and part of the plan.

This is the same for separated parents – Try and keep emotions or your own stuff out of it and agree to come up with a plan that is best for the kids and everyone in the family.