

# Talk Teeth with Your Teen

By Dr. Allan J. Milewski, D.D.S.

I have safely navigated the teenage years three times. If you have or have had teenagers yourself, you know what I mean when I say "safely navigated". Life with a teenager sometimes feels a lot like being a submarine captain...you really can't see where you are going, and there are potential minefields everywhere. Teenagers of course, know everything and don't hesitate to let you know that they are right and you, a mere parent, are invariably wrong. Having been through this stage in my kid's lives three times, I can assure you that eventually this, like all stages, will pass and that one day you will actually be wise again. It just takes a while.

One of the biggest challenges many teenagers have is understanding how the choices they make today can impact their tomorrow. It is a conversation I had frequently with my teenage children. Their lives were filled with a myriad of activities that kept them busy from dawn to long after dusk. Just reading



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their schedules made me tired, and it was easy to see how good dental hygiene could fall to the wayside.

But one of the things we know in the science of dentistry is that the dental hygiene habits your teenager practices today will play a large role in their dental health as they grow older. Thorough brushing and flossing removes disease causing plaque from teeth and gums. Strong dental hygiene habits don't develop over time, it takes a lot of

reminding and guidance from you, their parents. Do it. Stay on their case about it. Make sure they keep their regular appointments for a professional cleaning and exam with your dentist. Watch what they eat, and help them understand how nutrition plays a huge role in dental health. Let your dental professionals know if you have concerns about your child's dental hygiene habits. A strong partnership with your dentist and hygienist is very important during your child's teenage years.

February is National Children's Dental Health Month. So whether your child is four, fourteen, or forty-four pat yourself on the back for surviving parenthood. Give them a hug and remind them to floss and brush. When they roll their eyes, just smile and remind them again. And hope that someday, they too may be parents. After all, life does have some justice!

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