



Communicating with Your Teen: Tips to Keep the Lines of Communication Open

Communication with the teenager is extremely important, but many of the typical changes that occur during adolescence tend to interfere with the effectiveness and amount of interaction between parent and child. Although adults have much more experience in life than the adolescent, the teen is usually not aware of this fact or does not believe it; therefore, the advice, wisdom, and directions of parents are often not valued. Teens tend to spend more time in their room, with their peers, and away from family activities. Consequently, opportunities for communication diminish during this period of the child's life.

Because of these and other factors during adolescence, children do not confide in parents as readily, and do not communicate their feelings as much as they did when they were younger. In addition, general communication about their activities - what they did the day before, where they are going, or whom they are going with - also decreases. Therefore, many parents of teenagers have problems talking to their children, giving them advice, knowing their true feelings, or explaining things to them. On the other hand, children may have difficulty talking to their parents, expressing opinions, discussing things that bother them, or relating their experiences.

Here are some helpful tips to keep the lines of communication open between parents and teens:

1. Remember that during adolescence, communication generally decreases and a child will confide less in parents. This is a fairly normal process and should not be overreacted to.
2. Listen to what is being said; that is, try to understand the teenager's feelings and where she is coming from. Rather than thinking about arguments or retaliations, listen to her.
3. Stop what you are doing and look at the teenager. Listen when she speaks to you. Be sure that you are giving her the proper attention and that she is not talking to a newspaper or to your back.
4. Be sure most of your communication is positive, not negative. Don't dwell on mistakes, failures, misbehaviors, or something they forgot to do. Give them positive communication and talk about their successes, accomplishments, interests, and appropriate behavior.



5. Talk to them about their interests (e.g., music, sports, computers, dance-team practice, cars, motorcycles). Have conversations with them when you are not trying to make a point, to teach them something, or to impress them. Talk to them just to talk and to have positive verbal interaction.
6. Avoid talking too much - giving long or too-detailed explanations, repeating lectures, questioning excessively, or using other forms of communication that will result in the teenager turning a deaf ear to you.
7. Try to understand the teen's feelings. You do not have to agree or disagree with him; just make him aware that you understand how he feels. Do not try to explain away his emotions. There are times when you do not have to fix things or make the youngster feel better. Understanding how he feels may be the primary comfort that is needed.
8. Do not overreact to what is said. Remember, sometimes teenagers say things that are designed to get a reaction from their parents. In addition, do not say "no" too fast. Sometimes it is better to think about the request and give a response later. In other words, think before you speak.
9. Try to create situations in which communication can occur (driving the child to the doctor's appointment, having the teenager help you with household tasks). You have to be physically close to the teenager for communication to occur. A television in the adolescent's room can be an additional barrier to family communication. Whenever possible, the parent should try to do things *with* the teenager, rather than separately. Although the child may not frequently accept them, provide opportunities for him to do things with you.
10. Try to avoid power struggles, confrontation, and arguing matches. Your goal should be to have the communication move toward a compromise situation, rather than a battle. When appropriate, involve the teenager in decision making and setting consequences for his or her behavior.

(From: *Keys to Parenting Your Teenager* by Don Fontenelle, Ph.D.)