

PARENT Talk



Teen-Parent Communication

For most boys and girls in the United States, adolescence starts between ages 10 and 14. Parents and teenagers find adolescence a difficult period for many reasons.

For teens, it is a time of confused feelings, particularly in relationships with parents. Teenagers fight for independence yet fear too much freedom. They resent overprotection but need and want parental attention.

It is natural for teens to worry about acne, weight problems, menstruation, late development, early development, sexual arousal, school pressures, boredom, parental hassles, peer pressures and money problems.

Don't overreact

In the United States, adults generally view adolescence as a period of friction, change and problems. It's a challenge to keep a balanced perspective on their teenager's emotional roller coaster ride. Many parents brace themselves for the onslaught of adolescence, convinced that it is bound to be a long, hard struggle.

They are often quick to overreact the first time their teenager steps out of line. Parents may punish severely, withdraw trust and lost confidence in the youngster, thus severing the lines of communication.

Adolescence is a trying period, but it is also an exciting one, as teens begin to discover life in many ways for the first time. Once adolescence is over, even the most rebellious child often becomes appreciative and devoted. With maturity comes the realization that much of their parents' behavior, once so irritating, was motivated by feelings of love for them.

When asked about their problems with parents, teenagers most often cite "not being listened to." Listening is not always easy. Not is communicating.

How to talk – and listen – to your teen

Some of the following suggestions may help parents as well as teens.

- **Give your undivided attention.** When your teenager wants to talk, don't read, watch TV, fall asleep or make yourself busy with something else.
- **Listen calmly.** Concentrate on hearing and understanding the speaker's point of view. Don't start preaching when a give-and-take discussion is wanted.
- **Speak in a pleasant tone of voice.** Gruffness or abruptness can cause hostility.
- **Avoid making judgments.** Anyone avoids confiding in someone who is critical of his or her behavior.

Keep the door open on any subject. Too often teenagers avoid discussing things that may make their parents feel uncomfortable. Teens often pay a very high price for not having the right information on many subjects.

Try to set a good example. Too often people say one thing and do another. The old saying "actions speak louder than words" is particularly appropriate for parents with teens.

Be consistent in front of teens. Parents who appear confused about firmness and discipline, who are inconsistent or who disagree between themselves can be perceived as weak and divided. Teenagers need the security of knowing where their parents stand and what parents expect of them.

Respect the adolescent's desire for individuality and independence. Parents can accept and respect their teenagers as individuals without accepting all their ideas. Teens also can respect their parents while rejecting some of their beliefs.

Take an interest in your teenager's activities and friends.

Give them time to be with their friends and make their friends welcome when they come to visit. This does not mean parents should invade a teen's privacy.

Make an effort to say nice things. Too often parents focus on poor performance and behavior. Every human being needs acceptance and appreciation.

Pay attention to voice inflection and body language. Less than 10 percent of communication is accomplished through words.

Be specific. When airing a complaint, state the specific situation that bothers you. Don't generalize.

Focus on the problem, not the person. Talk about what action is bothering you, not about a character flaw.

Make eye contact. Look at the person you're talking to. Good eye contact helps build mutual understanding.

Listen actively. Use your own words to paraphrase your child's comment. He or she can then verify or clarify the message and intent. Inject your response only after he or she verifies the feedback.

If you need help.

If you need extra help in talking to your teen, call Crisis Services, at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. ©