



Talking with Teens



Two of the most difficult times in a person's life are probably being a teen and being the parent of a teen. Here are some tips to help parents keep teens talking about events in their lives so they can understand what their teens are thinking and feeling.

Think back on your own teen years. Remembering how you felt as a teenager can help you relate to what your teen may be experiencing. Did you feel confused, embarrassed or scared? Reading an old journal or yearbook may help you to remember events that you may have forgotten.

Offer encouragement and support. Continually let your teen know that you are proud of what they are doing and support their efforts. Remember, they are unsure about themselves during this awkward growth period and reassurance from you is very important to their self-confidence.

Be quiet and listen. Listening is one very important skill a parent must have during the teen years. Talking too much instead of listening can create the "You don't ever understand because you never listen to me" response that all teens are programmed to say to their parents. Let them know you want to hear what they have to say. Ask them to help you understand by talking about it.

Remember teens feel more than they think. Teens understand their feelings more than they understand their thinking. You may better understand what they were thinking if you ask how they were feeling. The following open-minded questions can help get them talking.

Instead of:

Do you think you can talk about it?
What do you think about that?
What do you think you're going to do?
What were you thinking?

Try:

Do you feel like talking about it?
How do you feel about it?
What do you feel you may do?
What were you feeling when you did that?

Keep offering to talk, but don't be pushy. If your teens don't want to talk with you, give them some time and try again. They may want to think things through before talking with you. Let them know they can always talk to you at a later time.

Understand the importance of friendships and peer groups. If your teen has a fight with a friend, ask if they are OK. Avoid talking badly about the friend because your teen could make up with them after a short time. Teens' peer groups are very important to their lives and are helping them to develop a sense of identity and learn about relationships.

Admit it when you don't know the answer. It's OK if you don't know. Letting your teen know that you do not have all the answers is better than giving them incorrect information. Tell your teen, "What a great question. I don't know. Do you want to help me find out?"

Reach out if you need help. If your teen begins behaving in unusual ways for more than three weeks, call your pediatrician or seek help from a professional counselor.

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