

Communication With Your Teenager

As a child becomes a teenager, a variety of changes occur. She will usually begin to spend more time with friends rather than family, and view these relationships as being more important. Although this feels uncomfortable to parents, for the child it is a necessary part of growing into an adult to separate from one's parents and gain more independence over time. This puts a strain on the relationship between parents and their child, and often this is very noticeable in how hard it is to communicate with your teenager.

Some suggestions which may help

Be available: Often parents and teens pass 'like ships in the night' and an extra effort is needed to create opportunities to talk. Become interested and involved in some of your son and daughters' special activities, perhaps fishing, football, netball, ice-skating. Do some chores together, e.g. washing the car. Mostly, they will not want to be involved, preferring to spend time with their friends. Keep trying though - they might surprise you.

Be interested: Most teenage interest centres around friends, music, sport, movies, T.V. and the opposite sex. It will sometimes help build your relationship with them if you can sometimes just chat about what interests them, rather than always having to make a point.

Be Positive: No one likes to be treated negatively all the time. Try paying special attention when your teenager does something that deserves praise, even if that's not very often. If you notice their good behaviour, they are more likely to repeat it.

Asking questions: Sometimes when you ask lots of questions your teenager may see it as being the "third degree". While asking questions is a way of showing your interest, try to keep it simple and go with the flow of conversation. Listen to him properly, allowing him time to answer and using the information he offers to direct the flow of conversation.

Avoid 'nagging' or lecturing: Too much lecturing may not be the best way of getting teenagers to co-operate, as it is often a signal to teenagers to stop listening. They can usually learn more from being allowed to experience the logical consequences of their behaviour.

Don't overreact: to statements made by your teenager. Young people may at times be over-dramatic for effect - e.g. "I don't care about school!" If a parent overreacts, before long any kind of reasonable conversation is out of the question. Instead, find out what he is trying to say by listening to what is perhaps a 'hidden' message - offer your point of view calmly and reasonably.

Don't say 'No' to a request: without thinking it through first and giving reasons why you are saying no. It is a part of normal growing up to question

the logic of decisions and expect fairness, and it will help the young person accept the decision if they can see why you made it, even if they don't agree.

If your teenager cannot take 'No' for an answer: Once you have reached a decision, state your case reasonably and firmly and stick to it! Don't get into a debate. If the teenager wishes to continue the debate, you can refuse to participate - they will soon lose interest in arguing by themselves.

Learning to compromise: Your teenager will be more likely to communicate with you if they feel you are being fair with them. If you have to say no to them, encourage your child to ask a different question, i.e. "What can I do to prove I can be trusted?" Communication, co-operation and perhaps compromise can be reached in this way. Teenagers may be able to show they are trustworthy by having an opportunity to go out, and behaving responsibly so you can allow it again, or by being more regular and co-operative when carrying out her chores around the house.

Learn to listen: Try to hear and understand what your teenager is saying. This often means not interrupting with arguments against his point of view, but rather ask questions to clarify and understand the other person's position. Try to give him your whole attention when he starts a conversation. Stop cooking or reading the paper, look him in the eye and listen.

Acknowledge your teenager's feelings: Often when a teenager expresses feelings and opinions on a subject, we try to explain away these feelings to make the child feel better. In fact, it is more helpful to acknowledge how she feels, which makes her feel that you have really heard her. She will probably then keep talking.

Try to have some fun! Sometimes the best way to get a teenager to relax and open up about serious issues is to have a laugh with them first. Try to find out what your teenager finds funny, which will also fit with your own sense of humour. You may have to bend a little with this one - chances are that what they find funny may be different to what you or your age group find amusing. But if you can have some humour with them, you may find that communication (and your relationship) with them will be made somewhat easier.

Some of the above is adapted from 'Keys to Parenting Your Teenager' by Don H. Fontanelle. Barrons Educational Series.

Parent Line

Help For Parents

Phone 13 2055.