

Parent/Teen Communication Tips:

“Like a relay race with a long overlap in which the baton is passed—lasting at least eighteen years and often longer —our job as parents is to position our children to run their solo laps effectively.” ~Maya Kabat-Zinn

Teens still want and need to feel close to their parents, even as they move towards independence.

Here are some tips for maintaining good connection & communication with your teenager.

- **Start with connection:** Teenagers who have stable, warm, trusting and open relationships with their parents are better equipped to develop independence and grow into responsible adults.
- **Listen more, talk less:** It sounds simple, but often isn't. If you're a good listener, you'll teen will talk to you more.
- **Get curious:** "Tell me more about that." "What was that like?" "What do you think?"
- **Use active listening:** Reflect back what you hear. It works like this: You listen without interrupting, then sum up what you've heard to allow your teen to confirm. It's OK if you get it wrong, your teen will know you are trying to understand and you'll know if you're not "getting it." Try these phrases:
 - "It seems like you're feeling..."
 - "I hear you saying..."
- **Use "Door Openers" Rather Than "Door Closers"** Door openers encourage your teen to talk openly. "Tell me what happened." "What do you think is the right thing to do?" "What happened next?"
- **Control your reaction when your teen talks about hard things:** when parents react too strongly, teens stop talking. Don't freak out when they tell you about the mean kid at lunch, or their friend who self harms. If you do, they are unlikely to share with you next time.
- **Take a Break When Things Get Heated:** Let things cool down. "I want to take time and think about this before we talk." Is anyone too hungry, tired or under the influence? Defer the discussion.
- **Accept and Validate feelings:** Acknowledge their feeling is true for them (even if it doesn't make sense to you) "You're hurt that Sarah did not invite you to the party." "You really don't like your teacher."
- **Ask what your child needs from you.** Do you want suggestions or do you just want me to listen." "How can I help?" Don't assume your child wants advice or "fixing."
- **Don't take the bait to respond to negativity and heat of the moment comments:** Try saying "Ouch" or "that was over the line."
- **Try the 80-20 rule: Keep 80% of your interactions positive, & non-directive.** That leaves 20% for "Did you do your homework," and "Clean your room."
- **Kind & Firm can go together:** You don't have to yell or shame in order to set a limit. "We agreed on the 11:00 curfew, and you came home twice after midnight. No, you can't go out tonight."
- **If needed, use scheduled time to talk:** Try family meetings or schedule time to talk about difficult topics. This can keep the tension about 'the talk' from bleeding into everyday life.
- **Notice and comment on the good stuff, even when it is hard to find:** "Thanks for feeding the dog." "You were a big help today with ___." If all you talk about is the bad grades or the snarky attitude, your teen may feel that is all you see in them (even when it 's not).
- **When asking your teen to do something they don't want to do, or setting limits:**
 - **Be brief.** When you're saying something your teen isn't interested in hearing. "Remember, no video games before homework."
 - **Be specific.** "Dirty clothes go in the white basket." "Family dinners are required unless you have practice."
 - **Be positive:** State expectations in positive terms- "don't be late," try, "be home by 11:30."

Suggested Resources

- Center for Parent/Teen Communication: Parentandteen.com
- [Communicating With Teens: Child Mind Institute](#)
- What to Say: How to Talk With Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance by Stixrud and Johnson
- I'd Listen to my Parents if They'd Just Shut up, by Anthony Wolf,
- How to Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk, by Mazlish and Faber