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Does my child care what I think?

Your child probably cares a great deal about what you think. You play an important role in shaping your teenager's behavior. Teens who say their parents warned them about drug use and set clear rules are less likely to use drugs. Parents' and teenagers' morals, future aspirations, and self-control are typically quite similar. Talking encourages family togetherness and increases the likelihood teens will share parents' values.

What kinds of things do teenagers want to talk about?

Generally, teenagers are interested in the following conversations:

- Family issues** Teens want to participate in decisions and be told about family problems.
- Controversial issues** Teens have questions like "What does sex feel like?" or "What does it mean to get high?"
- Emotional concerns** Teens want to know how you really feel about things.
- The big whys** Teens begin to have philosophical questions about issues like war and religion.
- The future** Teens are curious and concerned about what they can expect from the future.
- Current events** Teens have questions about what is going on in the world and in their community.
- Personal interests** Teens really want you to show interest in their activities, music, sports, and friends.
- Parents' lives** Teens are curious about what things were like when you were their age, including emotions you had and mistakes you made.



How can I talk with my teen?

All she wants to do is go out with her friends and spend time alone in her room. How can I talk with my teen?

- Don't lecture, talk for hours, or ambush your teen.
- If your teen tells you a secret, keep it.
- Listen carefully to her concerns and feelings, and respect her views. Teens are often afraid of being lectured, punished, or not understood.
- Stress that your teenager can and should make choices about his behaviors, and is responsible for these decisions.
- Offer praise. Make a date to spend one-on-one time with your teen. Find something you both like to do.
- Tell your teen you love him. With all the changes he's going through, he needs to hear it now more than ever.

Are you *really* listening to your teen?

Your messages to your teen may not be as clear as you think. To make sure you and your child are having the same conversation, communication should be interactive. Ask your teen what she wants to talk about. Teenagers often feel their parents aren't listening and dominate conversations. Many parents believe they are talking to their kids about drugs; unfortunately, the majority of kids don't remember these conversations. Parents need to be ready to talk when teens are, and not just when it is convenient for them.

Choose your battles.

Research shows only about 1 in 15 families have serious conflict that is harmful to the parent-teenager relationship. Typically, parents and teenagers argue over chores, curfew, and appearance – issues that are really not that important. Parents need to choose their battles and decide what is worth fighting about. What would really happen if your child didn't make his bed one morning? Wouldn't your energy be better directed towards issues like school, sex, drugs, or alcohol?

I know all parents and teens fight. How can we resolve these conflicts?

Your goal as a parent should be to solve conflict in a positive way. Teens are more agreeable when they think you are considering their needs and when they are part of the resolution process. Here are some tips for good problem solving:

- Establish ground rules so it's a fair fight.
- Agree to treat each other with respect and listen to each other's point of view.
- Reach a mutual understanding. You should both have the opportunity to say what you think. Make sure the other person really gets what you're saying.

Be polite and clear. Use I statements, such as "I feel _____ when you _____."

- Brainstorm together as many possible solutions as you can.
- Pick the options you like best, see where your interests coincide, and negotiate a solution you both think is acceptable.
- Keep in mind that arguments are very common in families with teens. However, most studies show that teens love their parents and value these relationships.

Where you can go for more information:

Families with Teens – University of Minnesota Extension
www.extension.umn.edu/familieswithteens/

Children, Youth & Family Consortium – University of Minnesota
www.cyfc.umn.edu

Kids Health
<http://kidshealth.org>

Talking with Kids About Tough Issues
www.talkwithkids.org

You may also want to look at:

Elkind, D. (1998). *All grown up and no place to go: Teenagers in crisis*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). *How to talk to teens about really important things: Specific questions and answers and useful things to say*. San Francisco: Wiley.

Steinberg, L. (2011). *You and your adolescent: The essential guide for ages 10-25*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

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