

Effective Communication with Teens

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Often it seems as if parents and teens are from different planets. Parents wonder where their delightful, compliant child has gone. But communication with teens is possible. Effective communication can enrich your bond if your teen feels “heard” and understood, and you have a continued opportunity to guide and influence.

Effective communication with adolescents can be summed up in two words – speak wisely. Use fewer words and shorter sentences. If you are talking too much, they will tune you out. Avoid repeating yourself. Make your point once – firmly – and then move on with the conversation.

It is also important to lower your voice; it helps your teen stay calm as well. Avoid crowding them physically or verbally. When teens feel cornered, it may increase defiant behavior.

Communication with ANYone is more effective when “I” statements are used. When confronting your child, speak about your feelings about what they did rather than behavior. For example, “It makes me sad when you and your sister fight” rather than “What is wrong with you that you keep messing with your sister?”

Whenever possible, organize your thoughts before you speak, particularly for the “big” talks. Try to gauge your child’s mood before starting a tough discussion. 7:00 a.m. is not usually a good time to have a heart to heart with an adolescent about why she is failing math. Additionally, don’t try to cram too much into one conversation; the “sex” talk, college choices, and how they did on their history mid-term should all be separate conversations, strung out over time.

One of the most challenging aspects of parenting a teen is when an argument becomes heated. Consider allowing your child the option of walking away. It may seem like defiance, but it may be an appropriate pressure-relieving technique as long as the conversation is picked up and completed later. Finally, do not use ultimatums unless absolutely necessary. Teens need to know that you will follow through with the consequences you have laid out. Don’t threaten to take away a privilege unless you are prepared to do so.

As difficult as it is, using these techniques may not only improve your relationship, but will be teaching them effective communication skills for their future.