

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEENAGER

1. Catch them when you can! Teens are filled with energy and activities and are usually on the run. A five-minute discussion can be more meaningful than a half-hour talk, which your teen may label a lecture.

2. Stop and talk, if possible, when your teen wants to share. Kids usually give "clues" when they need your attention. Stopping to sit, listen, look at them and respond is a message to them that you care. It makes the next time you talk easier.

3. Understand their development. While you're experiencing a difficult time, they may be, too. They are making decisions about their futures, are half "out the door" physically and emotionally and struggling to achieve a sense of independence. Kids need support and encouragement at this time. We often hear, "Just because I'm tall doesn't mean I don't need a hug once in a while." Let your teen learn what he or she is doing right. When you feel overwhelmed and can't help with a particular task, teach your teen how to utilize outside resources, such as guidance counselors.

4. Use "I feel" statements to convey your feelings and give your child the opportunity to respond in a similar manner. Kids at this stage intellectually exercise their abstract reasoning and may question you a lot. To avoid defensive behavior, contain your communication to the item you're discussing. Don't bring up past events. Express your feelings in terms of "I feel" (rather than "you did or said"); respond specifically to the situation you are discussing and when you are finished speaking, give your child an opportunity to respond.

5. Expect changes in relationships. Often before leaving home, adolescents miss a relationship with a parent they may not have been close to. Teens often request to live

with that parent to try to achieve a greater degree of closeness. This is not a rejection of the live-in parent, but rather a need for assurance, love and acceptance of both parents when possible. Be honest with your child in sharing the feelings and concerns you might have in permitting your child to live with or see the other parent more often.

6. Be honest with your feelings about the divorce and try to share them with your teen. That will convey a message that it's okay for them to share their feelings. A helpful reminder: you may feel differently about the divorce. You may have gone on with your life and may want to share your dating experience. Your teen may still be grieving about the divorce or be resentful of your dating if he or she is not.

7. Time-outs can do wonders. This can be a volatile stage for teens and with a major family change, all tempers may be short. During a calm time, discuss strategies for avoiding shouting matches such as: whenever a person feels like he is losing control, he can signal the other person and talking can cease until both parties are ready to resume.

8. Acknowledge all the positive things you can about your teen as well as the pressure he or she has. Just as you have difficult days at work, so do kids in school and on the job. You model caring. It will be returned to you if your teen can first experience your caring.

Distributed by:

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