

Parenting in Focus: Keeping Communication Open
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Even as your child becomes a teenager, she is still listening to you even when you do not think she is. She is still imitating you, even when you think she is rejecting you.

So let her see you reading. Let her see you talking out problems and solutions. Let her see you being fair. Let her see you being concerned about others. Her family is the primary model of how she will live her life.

While making every effort to keep communication open when she was younger, that goal has not stopped. Here are some general ideas on ways to help you succeed:

- **Make the time:** In today's world, it is even more important to set aside time to talk with your child who is a teen or even younger. You can have great discussions while you're driving or even puttering around the kitchen.
- **Listen to the little stuff:** If you listen to what they have to say, they will come. This is true on the heavy issues such as sex and drugs, or everyday things like school.
- **Listen between the lines:** For many children, it's hard to talk to parents about things that really matter. Pay attention to the things your teen struggles to talk about; you don't want to miss these important subjects.
- **Ask her opinion:** Few things please children — or anybody else — more than being asked their opinion. Ask your teen's opinions on both big and little things. You may be surprised at the maturity level of their responses.
- **Do not interrupt:** In a national survey, more than half of children said that when they talked, their parents often or sometimes did not give them a chance to explain themselves. Give your child some extra time to explain her opinion or desires, even if you think you know what she is going to say.
- **Do not dominate discussions:** Make sure that your teen is doing at least half the talking. Pauses just mean that someone is thinking.
- **Ask questions:** When you ask question, you get your child to answer and hopefully will get her to start talking more.
- **Keep up with your teen:** When you know some of what is going on in your child's world, it helps. Most teens report that their parents have more influence over them than their friends in terms of drug use. Try typing "smoking weed" into a web search engine and learn a bunch. Find out what the slang names for drugs really mean.
- **Understand today's pressure on your teen:** The more you know about the way your teen uses media and the pressures today's teens are under, the more helpful you can be. You need to know as much as possible what is going on in her world.
- **Begin early in her life:** The basis for these conversations is established early in life. If you have a child who is 4 and it will be awhile before she is a teen, start now to talk together.

Parenting can be a challenge. The best-kept secret is that it goes on forever. In their book “Positive Discipline for Teenagers,” Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott wrote, “Your challenge as a parent is to grow and change as fast as the times do and as fast as your teenagers do.” They are absolutely correct.

Be sure to end the conversation with a hug. Never underestimate the value of a big hug and saying “good night” to your teen.

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