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arents' And Teens' Talk



Adolescence is a trying period, but it is also an exciting one. If parents and teenagers keep tuned in to each other, this period may seem less trying and more fun for everyone.

Parents Can Help Keep Communication Open

When asked about their problems with parents, teenagers most often cite "not being listened to." Truly listening is not always easy, nor is communication.

Some of the following suggestions may help.

Give your undivided attention when your teenager wants to talk to you. Don't read, watch TV, fall asleep, or make yourself busy with other tasks.

Try to listen calmly, even when there is a difference of opinion. Concentrate on hearing and understanding your teenager's point of view. Don't start preaching when a give-and-take discussion is wanted.

Develop a courteous tone of voice. Respect brings respect. If we talk to our offspring as we talk to other people, our youngsters might be more likely to seek us out as confidants. Gruffness or abruptness can arouse hostility. A pleasant tone of voice can pay great dividends in improved relationships.

Avoid making judgments. Anyone avoids confiding in someone who is critical of his or her behavior. It is not necessary to approve of everything your teenager does, but it is important to understand the feelings involved. Putting yourself in another's place is not easy, particularly as attitudes, pressures, and choices change. It is a challenge for a parent to be firm about important values while being flexible enough to bend.

Keep the door open on any subject. Too often teenagers avoid discussing things that may make their parents feel uncomfortable. Belittling, humiliating, and laughing at youngsters can cause deep wounds and short-circuit the lines of communication. Teenagers often pay a very high price for not having the right information about many subjects, including sex.

Permit expression of ideas and feelings. Many young people have their own ideas about morality, marriage, work, education, time, money, and other parts of life. If their views are different from yours, that does not mean that they feel sure about them. Often young people "test" their ideas in conversation. To communicate, you must be willing to listen first and acknowledge their opinions, even if they alarm you. Then give your viewpoints as plainly and honestly as you can, recognizing that love and respect can exist, even when points of view are different.

Encourage positive self-worth. Help your youngster build confidence by encouraging but not forcing participation in sports, music, art, dance, or any other hobby or interest.

Be aware of how you treat other children in the family. Do you show favoritism? This could make children feel rejected, unloved, and jealous. Try to be fair and consistent. It will pay off.

Make an effort to say nice things. Too often parents tend to focus on poor performance and behavior. Every human being needs acceptance and appreciation.

Hold family conferences. Most teenagers feel they have little voice in family affairs. Family gatherings offer an excellent opportunity for children to participate in decision making and to work things out together.