

Family Communication

Mental Health Association of Montgomery County
Voices Vs. Violence Program

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Family communication and adolescent development

As communication decreases – what to do?

Teens and moods – what's going on?

Do's and Don'ts of communicating with teens

Problem-solving teen-owned problems

Setting limits and boundaries

Negotiating increases in privileges

Stating our beliefs and values

Doing what we say; teaching refusal skills; monitoring; natural consequences;
withdrawing privileges to correct

When to involve a professional:

1. School officials express concern about your child's behavior and academic performance.
2. Your teenager's behavior has changed suddenly and drastically for the worse, and persisted for at least a month.
3. You no longer feel that you can exercise control over what he does and with whom he associates.
4. Your teenager's mood is sullen, and she is withdrawn and uncommunicative.
5. Your child has frequent angry outbursts that scare you.
6. You no longer trust your child when he is out at night.
7. Your child has disappeared from the house for long periods without explanation.
8. You suspect that your child is involved with alcohol, drugs, theft, or other criminal behavior.
9. Despite your best effort, the situation does not improve.

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Resources:

Bernstein, Neil I. **How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do If You Can't.** New York: Workman, 2001. A psychologist noted for his work with "unmanageable" adolescents advises parents on limit setting, communication, self-esteem, peer pressure, and other topics.

Driekurs, Rudolf, with Vicki Soltz. **Children: The Challenge - The Classic Work on Improving Parent-Child Relations - Intelligent, Humane & Eminently Practical.** New York: Plume, 1990 (orig. 1964). Examples more applicable to younger children, and to a 1950s-1960s world – nevertheless, this book is the basis for much of what has been written on parenting for more than 40 years. Excellent chapters on encouragement; natural and logical consequences; being firm without dominating; sidestepping power struggles; having the courage to say "no"; the family council; etc.

Kahlenberg, Rebecca (Ed.) **"Like, Whatever" – The Insider's Guide to Raising Teens.** Sterling, VA: Capital Books, 2008. DC-area writers who are also parents of teens contribute chapters on driving, money, faith, discipline, health, sex, college admissions, step-families, and other topics.

Levine, Madeline. **The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids.** New York: HarperCollins, 2006. A practicing psychologist indicts our culture's materialism, pressure to achieve, perfectionism, and disconnection, as causing an epidemic of depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse among kids. She argues that our true goal in raising children must be to foster "an authentic sense of self."

Mogel, Wendy. **The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children.** New York: Penguin, 2001. A clinical psychologist turns to Jewish teachings as a source of enduring values and practices to guide today's parents. A good example of drawing from a cultural tradition to inform parenting today.

Taffel, Ron, with Blau, M. **Parenting By Heart: How to Stay Connected to Your Child in a Disconnected World.** Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991. This parenting expert, author, and workshop leader's mission can be summed up in the words of a child he quotes: "I just wish they would have more confidence in themselves as parents." Challenging many cultural myths that undermine parents' beliefs in themselves, he discusses unorthodox ways for parents to raise kids with compassion, consequences, and communication.

Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) <http://www.parentencouragement.com/>
American Psychological Association Help Center <http://www.apahelpcenter.org/>

Original URL: <http://life.familyeducation.com/teen/communication/39356.html>

FamilyEducation

Communication with Teens: Things to Remember

1. Remember that during adolescence, communication generally decreases and a child will confide less in parents. This is a fairly normal process and should not be overreacted to.
2. Listen to what is being said; that is, try to understand the teenager's feelings and where she is coming from. Rather than thinking about arguments or retaliations, listen to her.
3. Stop what you are doing and look at the teenager. Listen when she speaks to you. Be sure that you are giving her the proper attention and that she is not talking to a newspaper or to your back.
4. Be sure most of your communication is positive, not negative. Don't dwell on mistakes, failures, misbehaviors, or something they forgot to do. Give them positive communication and talk about their successes, accomplishments, interests, and appropriate behavior.
5. Talk to them about their interests (e.g., music, sports, computers, dance-team practice, cars, motorcycles). Have conversations with them when you are not trying to make a point, to teach them something, or to impress them. Talk to them just to talk and to have positive verbal interaction.
6. Avoid talking too much - giving long or too-detailed explanations, repeating lectures, questioning excessively, or using other forms of communication that will result in the teenager turning a deaf ear to you.
7. Try to understand the teen's feelings. You do not have to agree or disagree with him; just make him aware that you understand how he feels. Do not try to explain away his emotions. There are times when you do not have to fix things or make the youngster feel better. Understanding how he feels may be the primary comfort that is needed.
8. Do not overreact to what is said. Remember, sometimes teenagers say things that are designed to get a reaction from their parents. In addition, do not say "no" too fast. Sometimes it is better to think about the request and give a response later. In other words, think before you open your mouth.
9. Try to create situations in which communication can occur (driving the child to the doctor's appointment, having the teenager help you with household tasks). You have to be physically close to the teenager for communication to occur. A television in the adolescent's room can be an additional barrier to family communication. Whenever possible, the parent should try to do things *with* the teenager, rather than separately. Although the child may not frequently accept them, provide opportunities for him to do things with you.
10. Try to avoid power struggles, confrontation, and arguing matches. Your goal should be to have the communication move toward a compromise situation, rather than a battle. When appropriate, involve the teenager in decision making and setting consequences for his or her behavior.

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Parenting: The Teen Years

The teen years pose some of the most difficult challenges for families. Teenagers, dealing with hormone changes and an ever-complex world, may feel that no one can understand their feelings, especially parents. As a result, the teen may feel angry, alone and confused while facing complicated issues about identity, peers, sexual behavior, drinking and drugs.

Parents may be frustrated and angry that the teen seems to no longer respond to parental authority. Methods of discipline that worked well in earlier years may no longer have an effect. And, parents may feel frightened and helpless about the choices their teen is making.

As a result, the teen years are ripe for producing conflict in the family. Typical areas of parent-teen conflict may include:

- disputes over the teen's curfew;
- the teen's choice of friends;
- spending time with the family versus with peers;
- school and work performance;
- cars and driving privileges;
- dating and sexuality;
- clothing, hair styles and makeup;
- self destructive behaviors such as smoking, drinking and using drugs.

Dealing with the issues of adolescence can be trying for all concerned. But families are generally successful at helping their children accomplish the developmental goals of the teen years – reducing dependence on parents, while becoming increasingly responsible and independent.

However, there are a number of warning signs that things are not going well and that the family may want to seek outside help. These include aggressive behavior or violence by the teen, drug or alcohol abuse, promiscuity, school truancy, brushes with the law or runaway behavior.

Likewise, if a parent is resorting to hitting or other violent behavior in an attempt to maintain discipline, this is a strong danger sign.

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