



Tender Hearts Child Therapy Center

Parent Newsletter

February 2012

Effective Communication with Your Teenager

The teenage years are often a rough period for both parents and teens. Parents often get the feeling that no matter what they say, their teenager is not listening or doesn't care what mom or dad has to say to begin with. From the teen's perspective, mom and dad are being too overbearing or trying to pry into their personal business and they (mom or dad) just "don't get it."

So, how can a parent work on improving open communication with their teenager? Effective communication with teens starts with effective listening. Parents sometimes have a tendency to talk more than they listen, especially when they feel their teenager is making a bad decision. But this tendency to lecture only creates conflict and makes it more unlikely that your teenager will feel comfortable talking to you about something important in the future. Be sure to listen to what they have to say in a nonjudgmental way. No matter how much you disagree, start by letting the teen openly express what he or she has to say before thoughtfully responding.

Another good recommendation is to pick at least one meal each day to sit down and eat as a family. This gives families an opportunity to talk about the day's events or anything else that's on their minds. If meal time absolutely does not work due to scheduling issues, try to pick a specific time of the day, each day to talk to your teenager. Mealtimes are often the easiest but finding the time whenever you can is the most important thing.

Another point for parents to keep in mind is the concept of "self-fulfilling prophecies." In this sense, "self-fulfilling prophecy" means that if parents continually talk negatively or do not trust their teen, the teen's behavior may begin to more closely resemble what mom or dad are already implying. Parents of teenagers may often take a more controlling or negative tone when speaking to their teen, especially if there is already good reason for mom and dad to be on guard. When parents take a more negative stance in their conversations, the teen may feel like mom and dad do not trust them and nothing they do or say will make a difference. Therefore, they may feel they have nothing to lose with their behaviors.

Be careful with taking a negative tone and focusing only on the negative with your teen. This will only make them shut down even more and leads to further damage to the open lines of communication that parents are hopefully trying to encourage. While it may be hard in some cases, always try to focus on whatever positives your teen is doing and not just the negatives. By also taking the time to mention and talk about the good things the teen is doing, parents can promote their chances of keeping more open lines of communication.

Also, remember what it was like when you were 13 or 14 years old and mom or dad told you, "Don't worry about it, you won't even remember this in 5 years anyway" or something else along those lines? While parents may mean well when they say something like this, and quite often they are exactly right, teens interpret this kind of thing differently. Mom and dad "just don't get it" or "they don't understand" are common reactions on the part of the teen. Many of you probably remember feeling that way yourself when you were a teenager. Yet we so often repeat our parent's mistakes now that the shoe is on the other foot and we are parents ourselves. Be sure to listen and let your teen know that you are hearing what they are saying. Don't simply brush over what seems like an insignificant problem to you if your teen comes to you or opens up about something that is on his



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or her mind. If the problem is important enough that your teen comes to you for advice or just to "vent," remember to keep an open mind and never minimize what may be an important issue at that time in their life.

Lastly, as children grow older and enter the teenage years, parents often have trouble accepting the fact that rules and expectations need to change as well. As a parent, it's easy to rattle off the rules that have been in place for the past several years. But as teens grow older, it is our duty as parents to adapt and adjust those rules to allow our teenager to enter a world of more freedom coupled with more responsibility.

It's easy to simply say, "no, you know the rules" without really stopping to think about what your maturing teen may be asking for. Parents who keep an open mind and model good compromising and negotiating skills are not only teaching their teen a valuable life lesson but also building respect and maintaining open lines of communication.