

Trouble talking to teen? Try some of these ideas

We have a teenage daughter who seems to be withdrawing. We barely talk. I'm worried about what will happen when she deals with a stressful situation. If we can't talk about everyday stuff, how will we talk when it's really important?

Communicating with teenagers, whether they're girls or boys, can feel like an exercise in frustration. But it doesn't have to be. And you're right, the better you are at communicating with each other on a normal, day-to-day basis, the easier it will be to talk about serious issues when they arise.

First, you should realize that it's perfectly normal for teens to withdraw emotionally from their parents. The teen years are when people develop a sense of independence and self-awareness. At the same time, teens need to feel connected with parents, family members and peers. It can feel like a tug-of-war sometimes, but understanding that push and pull can help you not take your daughter's behavior personally.

What can you do to help? One of the best things parents can do is to create an atmosphere for open communication. When your daughter does express herself, take care that you show in your reaction that you accept and value her perspective and respect her opinions. Don't automatically respond with a story from your past; instead, summarize what she says, and ask questions to keep the conversation going.



If you're not already doing so regularly, it can be difficult to start having conversations with your teen on a daily basis. Try to arrange a regular time when you're both free to talk. The idea is to provide opportunities for your daughter to share what's going on in her world, without making her feel pressured.

In addition, think up some conversation-starting questions to ask when you're in the car with your teen or otherwise have the opportunity. Some examples: "What was the nicest compliment you ever received from an adult?" "Who is your favorite musician? What do you like about his or her music?" "Have you ever had a friend who you later realized was a bad influence? How did you handle it?"

For more ideas for "Conversations on the Go," see a blog post by an Ohio State University Extension program coordinator in family and consumer sciences: <http://go.osu.edu/teenconvs>.

For even more information, download "Communicating with Your Teen," an OSU Extension fact sheet, at <http://go.osu.edu/teencommPDF>. Also, "Understanding Teens," a fact sheet from New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension Service, provides background on development stages during adolescence. Download it at http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_f/f-122.pdf.

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