

Let's Talk: Communicating with teens

Presenter – Erica Hanlon, Clinical Counselor

Hi everybody, my name is Erica. And today let's talk about communicating with teens. So just being arounds teens comes with a lot of challenges. And the reason that is is because we got a lot of things just going on developmental. Teens are much more focused on their relationship with their peers than they are with their parents and caregivers. They also have a lot of mood swings and so you don't know what kind of teen, what kind of emotional state you're gonna be dealing with that person from one moment to the next. And also, teens just simply aren't going to take your advice and the reason that they're not going to take your advice is because one of their biggest developmental tasks during this age is to develop independence. So no matter how good your advice is, if they take your advice, they're actually interfering with that process of becoming more independent.

Categorize communications

So if you struggle with communicating with your teenager, I encourage you to think about the conversations you have with them in one of three categories. Category one is getting information from your teen. Category two is giving information to your teen. And category three is bonding with your teen.

Getting information

So let's talk about category one, getting information, from your teen. So in this category what you're trying to do is learn about your teen. What's going on in their lives? Who are their friends? What are they up to? What are they doing? The key to getting information from your teen is to reserve judgment. You might not like who their friends are or what they're doing, but try to keep your emotions low if you can while you're finding out that information. Because if your teen perceives that you're judging them, they're more likely to shut down. That's not saying that you can't raise concerns. Just try and shelve them while you're collecting that information at the time. Now you might also feel like your teen doesn't notice or blows you off when you show interest, but I encourage you to keep it up. Keep asking questions because your teen does notice that you're interested in their lives. And we also have research that shows that parents who are interested and involved in their teenager's lives have teens who engage in less high risk behavior. And when we say less high risk behavior, we're talking about things like drug use, sexual promiscuity, and also those

teens tend to do better in school when they have parents and caregivers who are interested in their lives.

Giving information

So category two is giving information to your teen. Now the key here is to avoid lecture mode because if you start lecturing to your teen, they're probably going to shut down and tune you out. So it's up to you to really pay attention to your teen to see if they're paying attention to you. So once you notice that your teen is checking their phone or tuning you out and their eyes start to glaze over, you probably want to stop talking because you've already lost them. So either stop talking or maybe try asking them a question to get them back involved in that conversation.

Bonding with your teen

So the third category is bonding with your teen. Now if you're only coming to your teen when you have concerns about what's going on, then you're going to accidentally condition your teen to think that every time you approach them and wanna talk that it's because there's some kind of issue going on. So when you engage in these bonding activities with your teen, you're really doing that nitty gritty part of relationship building with your teen. So find out what your teen is interested in and then engage in those activities with them. Maybe that's going to the movies or going shopping or going golfing or playing video games, but find out what your teen likes to do and then try and do those activities with them.

Communicate for success

So to wrap up, just remember that if you're frustrated with your teen, it's completely normal to feel that way. Building a relationship with your teen may be an exercise in frustration, but keep at it. Don't give up and it'll pay off in dividends as your child moves into adulthood and you have a healthy relationship with him or her.

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