



### Tips for Communicating With Teens

- ❖ **When you're upset, try to take time before reacting. Remember to bring yourself to the teen's perspective;** it is necessarily different than the adult's perspective. Think about reasonable psychological, moral and ethical expectations to have of your teen at *their* particular age and stage—not where you'd like them to be, where their friends or siblings are at.
- ❖ **The "When" and "How" is as important as the "What":** When we talk to our teens, we really want them to **get it**. Usually because if they don't **get it**, we're going to **get them**. Here are some tips to keep in mind about how and when to make contact:
  - Eye contact is to be avoided; better if both of you are looking at something else (talk while driving, while watching a movie, while making dinner).
  - Talking late at night is best: when adults are tired, they tend to listen more and talk less. Wide awake adults give advice. Teens like to avoid wide awake adults.
  - Lectures and emphasizing something more than once doesn't help the teen "get it." It usually invites them to shut down or tune us out.
- ❖ **Ask questions or make requests that require information, not just "yes" or "no":**
  - When everyone seems like they're being a jerk, it's so lonely. How do you deal with it?
  - Can you explain it to me? I really don't get it, but I want to.
- ❖ **Especially important: Put your teen in the expert role sometimes, even if they aren't an expert:**
  - "Wow, what do you think of that commercial? Did it work to get you interested?"
  - "What did you think of that speech?"
  - I know I'm the grown-up here, but I just don't understand how it works. Would you mind showing me how to do it?
  - "You said this is the first "A" you got in English this semester? That must feel good. What worked well for you?"
- ❖ **Guarantees for trouble in communicating (some tongue-in-cheek help):**
  - **Always choose the time and the subject for conversation.** If you always choose the time and place for how and when things get talked about, you'll invite your child to lie, clam up or feel ashamed.
  - **Top their problem with one of your own.** If your 13-year old says, "The teacher is SO stupid and mean and always thinks I'm disrupting class; plus Derek is acting like an idiot and goes unnoticed," and YOU say, "you think that was bad, when I was your age, I was always beat up, and we had no money!," you can guarantee your child will either create BIGGER problems for you to listen to, or will stop telling you the truth.
  - **Trivialize, ignore or blame them for their ethical dilemma or problem:** If your child just downloaded a bunch of difficulties and you say "you'll get over it" or "what's the big deal?" or you just say, "I'm too busy" or you say, "well you asked for it," you guarantee withdrawal or anger
  - **If they're in crisis, lecture them about how they got there OR make sure they feel really bad so that they'll "never do it again":** If your child is in crisis, it doesn't help to tell them why they're there during the crisis. Also, the lecture that is "tacked on" at the end of the punishment/consequence almost guarantees that your teen will feel ashamed, angry or resentful about your "helpful hints"

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