

## How do I talk to my teen?

Information from:

<http://www.jamiecopaken.com/Pages/HowDoITalkToMyTeen.aspx>

- Teenagers may act dismissive, but they still absorb what you say.
- Continue to discuss important issues.

### SCHOOL WORK

#### *Why is my child not succeeding in school?*

This could be due to several reasons. He could be emotionally upset about some major change in his life. He could be rebelling against your wishes. He could be trying to fit in with friends who won't like him if he's "too smart." The material may be too difficult for him. He could have a learning difference/disability. Maybe he has too many activities and chores and has no time to study. Maybe he has no quiet place to study. Ask him and his teachers.

#### *She never does homework.*

- The best way to get a teen to do her homework is to supervise her.
- Find her a quiet space to study.
- Clear one half hour each night when she can only do homework. Ban all other activities during this time.
- Don't do the work for her. Help her only after she's tried. Let her take responsibility.
- Work with the teacher. Call the teacher and ask for help.
- Help her use "chunking." This is taking a large assignment and breaking it into smaller pieces. For example, just do a few math problems at a time. Or spread larger assignments over several days.
- Motivate with praise for effort and success. This builds confidence.
- Use incentives and rewards. Only after the work is done – and done well – can she be allowed to do fun things, like watching TV, talking on the phone or going out.
- Back up your words. Be clear about consequences and follow through with your promises and punishments.

### LISTENING SKILLS

#### *How do I talk to my teenager so he hears me?*

A loving relationship cannot exist without communication. Kids have valuable things to say and, when a parent listens openly and genuinely, it builds self-esteem and confidence – for you and your kid.

Do:

- Give undivided attention. If you can't, share what's going on with you: "I had an awful day. Can I talk to you in an hour?"
- Validate his feelings: "I can see this really upsets you." "I understand how that must feel."
- Use "I" statements, not "you" statements: "I feel worried when you don't come home on time" rather than "You never come home on time!"
- Praise. Thank them for telling you, even if you don't like what you hear.
- Ask how you can help. He may just want you to listen, not to solve the problem. Remember that when your child says, "I don't know what to do," this does not equal, "Please tell me what to do."
- Identify the problem and the feelings.
- Brainstorm solutions.

Don't:

- Interrupt, lecture, accuse, nag, yell, criticize, or ignore his perspective.

### She says I never listen to her. How do I listen when she makes me so angry?

- The first step is to accept her right to say whatever she has to say, no matter how unreasonable it may seem.
- You can walk away at any point.
- Kids sometimes pick the worst times to talk. Try and listen when she needs you. If you can't, suggest another specific time to talk.
- Pay attention, even if it sounds meaningless and small. If she can trust you with small stuff, she's more likely to trust you with bigger concerns.
- Notice what your nonverbal communication says. Are you maintaining eye contact, nodding, using a caring tone?

### PROBLEM SOLVING

#### He's come to me with a problem, what do I do?

Have confidence that you are the right person for the job. Let him express himself. Try not to interrupt. Ask him if he can come up with a solution himself. Help him brainstorm several options, and discuss which one he picks.

Giving advice can make a teen feel helpless and less independent. Try to get him to come up with the solution himself. If that fails and the situation is serious enough that you must advise, do so.

#### "What did you do today?" "Nothing."

How do you get a silent kid to open up? Short answers and not wanting to talk to parents is all part of being a teenager. But keep trying. They'll be glad you did.

- Activities promote communication. Find something you can enjoy together, and conversation will flow more easily. Even though family and work schedules are complicated, try to do things together. Maybe at the same time once a week, eat as a family, cook together, do chores together, go for a walk, watch TV or movies.
- Attend her events. This shows that you support her and allows you to see what she cares about. Often teens appear hopeless or lazy at home, but are very serious outside of the home, like at a job, activity or in school.

### DISCIPLINE

#### I never talked to my parents that way.

You probably didn't. But today's kids, like it or not, have changed. They are less fearful, less obedient and more outspoken. In most situations, threatening them and inducing fear may only provoke anger and resentment – for both of you. It also teaches kids that the only way to get what they want is through fear and intimidation.

- When you are setting limits and rules: Don't be pulled into long arguments. You can listen to his initial argument, but then stop and tell him you're leaving the room. Teens often argue just to avoid doing what you tell them.
- When he breaks a rule: State the rule has been broken. Emphasize that the behavior is unacceptable. Declare the rule is still in effect.
- Avoid empty threats, name calling, and getting pulled into extra arguments.
- Be calm, clear and concise.
- Pick your battles. Not everything is worth the fight.

### Other sources:

1. [parentingteen.com](http://parentingteen.com)
2. [theantidrug.com](http://theantidrug.com)
3. The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parenting a Teenager
4. Homework without Tears
5. Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall