

Counseling Corner

Why Is Talking With Your Teen So Difficult?

from the American Counseling Association

Virtually every parent has found that trying to communicate meaningfully with their teenager can frequently be an impossible, frustrating task.

You want to help with problems and understand your child's life and stresses, yet your best efforts at conversation may be met with stony silence, meaningless grunts or outright hostility over your daring to try and communicate.

Such an experience can have parents wondering what is wrong with them, or with their teenager. The reality is that what they're experiencing isn't unique or unusual, but rather the result of issues almost all teens face.

A main factor is that it isn't easy being a teenager in today's world. Not only are there the variety of unsettling biological, psychological and emotional changes that come with normal teen development, but today's teens face the added pressures of school grades, extracurricular activities, increased public visibility (thanks, Facebook), along with the anxiety of college or a career in the very near future.

Teens tend to feel that their parents just aren't able to understand all the changes and pressures they're facing, in part because they don't understand much of it themselves.

Another major obstacle to parent-teen communication is the recognition that teens have of their growing maturity and ability to make decisions. They want more freedom and the trust of their parents, but when they start sharing feelings of insecurity or uncertainty they fear their parents will see them as still immature and unready for the freedoms they desire. They also recognize they need their parents' love and respect in order to gain their freedom and so are usually willing only to share their strengths and positive achievements.

While it's helpful to understand what is limiting open communication, the only real solution to improving parent-teen talks is to keep on trying. When you attempt to stay connected to your teen, even if you're not always successful, it demonstrates your love and concern to him or her.

How you communicate matters, too. Being overly judgmental, saying "no" too quickly to requests for more freedom, or dismissing the teen's concerns, quickly shuts down communication. Instead, be understanding when mistakes are made, and offer positive

responses when good things happen. Be supportive and let your teen know that you understand and sympathize with issues he or she is facing.

There is no miracle cure for parent-teen communication, but work at it sincerely and you will see improvement.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at counseling.org

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