



# COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEEN

*Effective ways to engage and connect*

If you are the parent of a teenager, you likely have someone who is moody, noncompliant, exploring limits, and much less interested in talking to you than doing anything else. Being a parent of a teenager requires a great deal of balance and patience. One must strive for a balance between firm yet flexible, being involved and observing, and affirming yet challenging. Of course a sense of humor does not hurt either! Although every child is unique, here are some general strategies for surviving the dramatic ups and downs of the teenage world.

## **FOCUS ON LISTENING AND UNDERSTANDING, RATHER THAN TALKING AND LECTURING.**

Open ended questions, reflections, mutual discussion, and being non-judgmental are critical for increasing communication with teenagers. When teenagers feel a genuine sense of respect, they tend to open up more easily. In addition, body language, facial expressions, and general attitude are often more telling about what is going on with your teenager than their actual words. Even if their head is down, the fact that they are still in the room with you means a great deal.

## **BE CONSISTENT WITH RULES AND DISCIPLINE**

Though teenagers sometimes act like they do not need you, they do because they are still learning how to problem solve, make decisions, and formulate beliefs and opinions that will shape their adult life. Provide enough rules to monitor their behavior without dictating every minute of their life. Set clear limits and when necessary, provide natural consequences for breaking rules.

## **GET INVOLVED IN THEIR INTERESTS AND HOBBIES.**

Encourage their natural enthusiasm for adventure by taking them to a rock climbing class at the YMCA, even if rock climbing may not be your first choice. Or foster their love of the creative arts by taking a pottery class together. Support their individual interests, as they are a reflection of themselves.

## **GET TO KNOW THEIR FRIENDS, BOY/GIRL-FRIENDS, AND THEIR FRIENDS' PARENTS.**

Ask questions, stick around for a few minutes when they are hanging out at home, but do not spy on them or smother them with your presence. Expecting your child to inform

you of their whereabouts on a regular basis is both appropriate and essential in maintaining a connection to your child's life.

### **RESPECT YOUR CHILD'S INDIVIDUALITY & SPIRIT!**

An adolescent's job is to create a separate identity from their parents, in order to foster independence. This may involve exploring beliefs and values outside of their family's personal standards and ideals, but all of this is necessary to help them figure out who they are in relation to their family, friends, and the world at large. Expect opposition within limits, as long as they are not hurting themselves or others.

### **BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL FOR YOUR CHILD.**

You are your teenager's number one teacher in words, actions, beliefs, and opinions. Model appropriate behaviors and self-care in order to actively demonstrate what it takes to live happy, fulfilled, and healthy lives.

### **STRIVE TO BE YOUR CHILD'S PARENT RATHER THAN THEIR FRIEND.**

Trust the fact that your child is fully capable of making their own friends. However, they only have one mother and one father to parent them and need you to remain in that role. Having a

close relationship during adolescence can help to nurture your relationship into a friendship as your child matures into an adult.

### **A SENSE OF HUMOR IS MANDATORY!**

A teenager's job is to be moody and irrational at times, so try not to take it personally. It is rarely about you in the first place!

For more information on improving communication with your teenager, contact FCS Counseling. Services are available in some area middle and high schools.



**Colin Fee, LMSW** is a Licensed Master Social Worker. Colin has eleven years of experience working with a variety of clients. Most recently he worked with children and families whose lives have changed due to adoption. Prior to this, he has experience working with youth who have behaviors that put them in trouble with the legal system. Colin believes that everyone who walks through his door is capable of making a change in his or her life. Any change—even a little one—can lead to something awesome in a person's life. Colin is available for individual and group therapy. Modalities include Solution-Focused Therapy, Feminist Therapy, Relational-Cultural Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy.

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