



HOPE Newsletter - Issue 31

8 Communication Strategies That Will Encourage Your Teen to Talk to You

By Amy Morin, LCSW

It's interesting that teens can't seem to stop talking to their friends, yet many of those same teens have nothing to say to their parents. Ask a teen how his day was and you're likely to hear, "Fine." Follow up by asking, "What did you do," and you'll likely hear, "Nothing."

Those one-word answers and closed bedroom doors leave many parents feeling shut out from their teen's world. And while it's developmentally appropriate for teens to distance themselves from their parents a bit, it's important not to lose your connection all together.

If you're struggling to get your teen to talk to you, here are eight strategies that can get your teen to open up:

1. Reflect What You Hear

When your teen talks to you, don't jump in and automatically share your opinion. Instead, reflect what you hear to make sure you fully understand what your child is trying to communicate.

Say something like, "So what I hear you saying is, you think you should have a later curfew because your friends are allowed to stay out later. Is that correct?" Your teen will appreciate your willingness to listen.

2. Treat Your Teen Better than a Stranger

It may sound obvious; however, if you're like most people, there may be times that you treat those closest to you worse than everyone else. Sometimes, it's easier to be polite to complete strangers, and intolerant with family members.

Commit to treating your teen with kindness and respect, even when you've had a bad day or when you're frustrated by your teen's actions.

Showing empathy and understanding will help you gain trust and earn respect from your teen.

3. Validate Your Teen's Feelings

Validating your teen's emotions doesn't mean you have to agree with your teen's feelings. For example, if your teen says she's really upset about something, say, "I hear how frustrated you are." Even if you think her response is overblown, make it clear that whatever she feels is OK.

4. Change Your Pattern of Communication

If your current attempts to communicate with your teen don't seem to be working, do something different. Continuing the same pattern of communication will only continue to yield the same results. Try something new, like asking a different question when your teen walks through the door or try to strike up a conversation over email instead of in-person.

5. Listen More Than You Talk

Long lectures and repeated warnings aren't an effective way to get your teen to talk. In fact, the more you talk, the more your teen may shut you out.

Invest most of your communication energy into listening. Use active listening skills to show that you really want to develop an understanding of what your teen is trying to communicate.

6. Ask Questions that Help Your Teen Reach the Answer

Ask questions that encourage your teen to talk to you. Open-ended questions can be very effective conversation starters. It's important to avoid interrogating your teen, however. Approach your teen with a sense of curiosity, and use a variety of questions to keep the conversation interesting.

7. Problem-Solve Together

When your teen has a problem, resist the urge to give her advice. Engage her in active problem-solving instead.

Whether she's struggling with school, or she's experiencing problems with friends, brainstorm solutions together. Praise her ideas and work together to examine the pros and cons of various solutions. Offering guidance while tackling problems together can encourage your teen to go to you for help.

8. Build Credibility

Your teen's assumption that you can't possibly understand what he's going through is likely to be a barrier to communication. But if you work to build credibility, your teen will be more opinion to trusting your opinion and shes'll be more likely to take your feedback seriously.

TOWNSHIP OF NUTLEY
1 Kennedy Drive - Nutley, New Jersey 07110 - (973) 284-4951
Website: www.nutleynj.org - Facebook: www.facebook.com/nutleynjgovernment