

Communicating with Teens

Making time to listen

- We DO actually need to listen - it's one of the most common complaints adolescents make about parents - "They never listen to me – they interrupt and start telling me off, there's no point trying".
- Demonstrate you are listening and interested by nodding and asking questions (leave the cautioning messages for later). This breeds good communication and teens who will want to talk to you when they have a problem.
- If you don't have time to listen it is better to postpone the conversation rather than pretend to be listening. It's ok to say "I don't have time at the moment but let's chat after dinner tonight". Make sure you follow-up with them later as promised.
- Communicate giving full attention – use open body language (i.e., no crossed arms) and eye contact. This shows them that you respect what they are saying and are fully attentive.
- Timing is everything - there are better and worse times to say things. Avoid important talks when they are tired/hungry/emotional or about to run out the door to do something.
- Communicate when there are no distractions (i.e. TV or computer games). Keep requests simple, short and as positive as you can - "Can you please put the dirty clothes in the basket before school or you'll have to do it after school when you want to play - thanks darling!"
- Talk while you are having fun or doing things as a family – swimming, walking, at the park, in the car or at the dinner table. Encourage them to talk about their interests and let them take the lead. It's also a great time to praise them "you sound like you're doing really well at hockey. That's great"
- Find a time each day to share what's happening in your world and ask about theirs. Calling into their room just before bed and having a brief chat at bedtime can be a great way to "check in" with them on a daily basis. No matter how cool they are all teens like being told they are loved. Make it a habit.
- Don't forget to use hugs, kisses, smiles or a pat on the arm or shoulder to communicate too. No matter how much they may pretend to dislike it, teens enjoy and need affection just like we do. Remember they need to have it modelled to them in order for them to feel comfortable with it.