

Hints for Talking with Teens

Before you start any “charged” conversation:

BE STILL: sit down for a few moments alone and just note what is going on with you. Your thoughts: do you have the whole conversation figured out in your head? Your feelings: are you anxious, angry, scared, what are your real feelings about what you are going to talk about? Check in with your body: are your hands clinched, are you bouncing your knee up and down? These are all things that your teen will notice, consciously or unconsciously and can react defensively to, even before you really start. All of the things that are going on with you are your responsibility. So, be clear where you are with it all before you start. Often times it is best to wait until both parties are calm.

BE CURIOUS: everyone is more willing to talk and to talk honestly when someone is actually interested in what he/she is saying. Really interested. Oftentimes parents can already have a judgment or an idea of what is right or wrong even before we sit down to talk about it. If that is the case, even if the judgment seems totally accurate (i.e., “Don’t drive drunk”), the judgment in itself prevents your teens from even wanting to talk to you about what is going on. This one thing is a major stumbling block with parent/teen communication. Either party can come to the table with “I am right.” This has to be let go of by both parties or there is a stalemate. We are the adults and it is our responsibility to be the first to express the option of throwing out our judgments for the next hour or week and really have a conversation. Let your teen know you are curious about why they make their decisions. Teens learn to communicate from the families they live with. What could be more interesting than our own child?

LISTEN: After we have gotten still and curious we now have the potential to listen to our teens. One of the main complaints that teens have is that nobody listens to them. It is amazing the difference it can make once they believe that you are really listening to them in a way that is open and nonjudgmental. Also, if we do not listen to our teens, why in the world would they want to listen to us? How can we share with them our experiences or concerns? Teens want direction. They want boundaries, but they need to be very clear and they need to be decided on together. Teens are much more willing to live within the boundaries set if they help create them and the consequences thereof. Listen to what they have to say and **WHY** they say it. Listening is one of the most powerful tools you have with your teen. Every time you want to really express something, try listening for a while first and see the difference it will make.