

A Guide to Parent-Teen Communication

Now that your child is a teenager, you may need to find new ways of communicating with him. That's because his growing independence and desire for privacy might make him less likely to tell you about his life. But regular parent-teen conversations are possible—and important—since staying in touch helps kids make healthy choices and do well in school. This guide is filled with strategies that can help.



Make yourself available

When your teen seems to be in a talkative mood, take advantage of it! Whether he mentions a new video game or a job he's thinking of applying for, you can show interest by asking questions. If he sees that you care about things that matter to him—big *and* small—he'll be more comfortable coming to you in the future. *Tip:* Pay attention to when and where he tends to open up, such as after he finishes homework or while you're walking the dog together. Then, start conversations in those situations.

Find common ground

Think of a hobby or an interest that you share, then mention it to your child. For example, if she's in band, she might enjoy hearing your tales of playing the trumpet in high school. Maybe she'll tell her own stories about the fun and challenges of band camp and parades. Or if you follow a favorite sports team, make plans to watch a game on TV or attend one in person. Wear team colors, and cheer your hearts out! *Tip:* Can't think of a shared interest? Create one by trying something new. You could take a knitting class at a yarn shop together. Or download an app to learn a foreign language she's studying in school.



A chance to chat

If a busy schedule keeps you and your teen from communicating regularly, consider these ideas for staying connected.

■ **Eat together.** Some of the best conversations take place over food. Leave cell phones in another room and turn off the TV so you can focus on each other. Then, stick to upbeat topics like the latest episode of a comedy your family watches or how you plan to celebrate an upcoming holiday. Keeping the mood relaxed will make your high schooler look forward to coming to the table.

■ **Write it down.** While there's no substitute for face-to-face communication, leaving notes for each other is a good way to stay in touch, too. For instance, if you go to work before your teenager wakes up, leave a note that says something like, "Good luck on your test today!"

■ **Be spontaneous.** Sometimes you've got to seize the few minutes you have for a quick chat. Many parents find this happens in the car. While you're driving your teen to school or a friend's house, use the time to catch up. Or invite your child to work out with you so you can squeeze in some uninterrupted time together.



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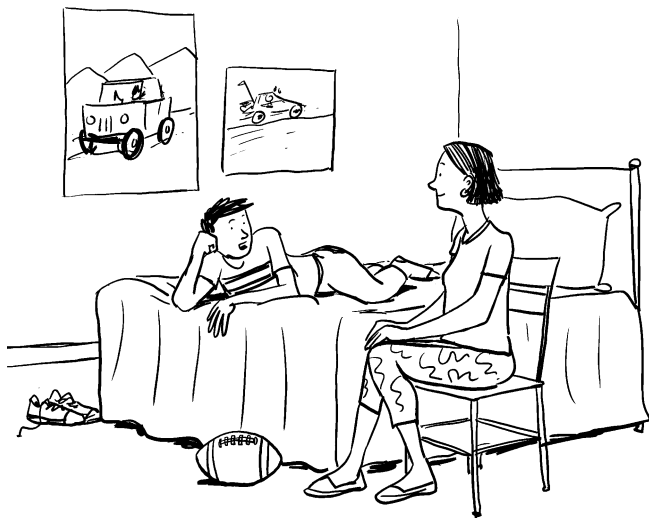


Develop mutual trust

Solid relationships are built on a foundation of trust. Your high schooler will be more likely to communicate openly and honestly with you if she trusts you. Keep personal details about her life private, such as her SAT scores or friendship dilemmas, unless she gives you permission to share them. You need to be able to trust her, too. Let her know that you do, unless she gives you a reason not to. It helps to keep in mind that her need for privacy is normal at this age. Just because she doesn't tell you everything doesn't mean she's doing things she shouldn't.

Be a good listener

If your teen shares a problem with you, try to offer support without criticizing. For example, if he's going through a breakup, you could say something like "I know this is hard and that you really care about her" rather than "You're young, you'll get over it." Before offering advice, ask if he wants to hear it—or if he just needs you to listen.

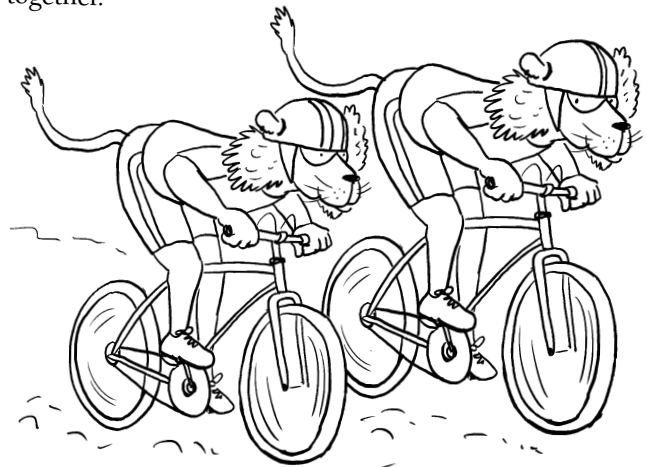


Give space

You might notice that your teen seems to be struggling with something, but you're not sure what's going on. Gently ask if she'd like to talk. However, don't pry, as it might backfire. If she says no, assure her that your offer stands, and let her work it out as long as you don't believe her health or safety is at risk. Then, choose a time when she seems to be in a good mood, and try again. *Note:* If your teen seems depressed or anxious for two weeks, contact her doctor or school counselor.

10 ways to have fun with your teen

Looking for something your high schooler will enjoy doing with you? Even though he might not admit it, he still wants to spend time together, and sharing activities can lead to great conversations. Here are 10 to consider doing together.



1. Find and try new recipes.
2. Go for a bike ride in your neighborhood.
3. Play card games and board games. Even better, start a weekly family game night.
4. Explore a nearby town you've never visited.
5. Attend a community festival to enjoy local art, music, games, and food.
6. Volunteer for a cause you both support.
7. Plant and tend a flower or vegetable garden.
8. Do something your teen used to like as a youngster, such as roller skating or camping in the backyard.
9. Sign up and train for a 5K race or walk.
10. Perform random acts of kindness for strangers.

High School Years