

Ruth's

6 TIPS - HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEENAGER

Communicating with your teen involves much more than just talking. At the heart of it all is the chance for you to connect and learn what is going on in their life. This connection is what reinforces within your teen the sense of home and a safe haven during a time of uncertainty and transition in their life.

TIP 1: Be consistent

Look and grab every opportunity to connect with your teen. Don't schedule a once a week catch-up chat to find out what took place over the past week. Or, don't wait to find out that he is having problems when the school calls. Rather, always be on the look out for small opportunities to chat, for example while driving him to school or soccer practice. Don't force a conversation but try often and enjoy even the shortest of answers. Don't despair if 90% of your attempts are ignored. Family suppers were non negotiable with my children, and no electronic devices were allowed at the table. Oh, and the television was also not on in the background. At the end of the day what is important is that your teen knows you are available to talk (**and listen**) when he is ready to talk to you.

TIP 2: Focus

Put the newspaper down, the laptop away and the phone on silent. Offer your undivided attention, even if the favour is not returned. This is an opportunity to lead by example, and it is good to show that there are times when it is best not to multi-task.

TIP 3: Timing

Try and be respectful of your teen's schedule and interests. If you are free but your teen is just sitting down to watch a favorite show, then it may be better to watch the show alongside him and try and catch up during commercials, instead of talking at that exact moment. Choose a time to initiate communication that works for your teen, rather than a time that fits into your schedule.

TIP 4: Don't talk

Make an effort to listen more than you talk. This is one of the best ways to communicate with and talk to your teen because it helps you avoid talking at him. Try to not formulate your answer while your teen is talking, pay attention to their body language and facial expressions. Listening and watching allows you to learn what's going on with your teen and it encourages him to communicate more, he can tell you how he is feeling and what's going on without feeling judged or worry about being corrected.

TIP 5: Use Technology

Teens text more than any other age group. Busy schedules may make it difficult for a lot of face time, but don't let that stop you from reaching out and maintaining a consistent presence in your teen's life. Send texts to check in and offer support. Shoot your teen a text to see how his day is going. "Like" one of his posts on Instagram -- without leaving an embarrassing comment, of course!

TIP 6: Go for a change of scenery

Every conversation you have with your teen does not need to take place at the dinner table. After all, variety is the spice of life, so seek out changes of scenery. Go out for an ice cream together, take a walk or go to the mall. Choose settings that will appeal to both of you and help you enjoy a little time together. The chances that they will talk to you in a neutral environment is much greater.