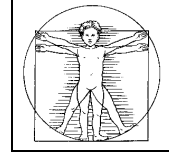


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TALKING WITH TEENS **From: UnderstandingTeenagers.com**

By far the most common issue that comes up when discussing teenagers with adults is that of communication. Be it with regards to maintaining good relationships, effective discipline, or setting boundaries, the practice and skills of good communication are always involved.

There are lots of ways that communication skills can be improved. An obvious method of creating better communication outcomes is to reduce communication mistakes. This post outlines 5 common pitfalls adults often encounter when communicating with teens.

Talking More Than Listening

There is an old saying that we are all given two ears and one mouth, to remind us that we should spend twice as much time listening as talking. This is especially important when communicating with teenagers.

Teenagers often have things to say to adults, but get frustrated at the lack of opportunity. Ironically adults in turn get frustrated at teenagers not communicating or sharing anything with them. Listening carefully and asking helpful questions will often illicit far more information from a teenager, than trying to set the agenda and focus on topics that you think are important.

This tendency of adults to speak more than listen is responsible for generating unnecessary conflict. Adults will often react based on assumptions to teenagers. By asking questions and exploring reasons behind teen behavior, adults will be in a much better position to respond appropriately.

While young teens aren't perfect and still need guidance, communicating in a more adult manner with them through discussion and negotiation, as opposed to lectures, will provide much better outcomes.

Constantly Express Negatives

There is a lot to be said for the notion of self-fulfilling prophecies. The way we speak can often result in the outcomes we are trying to avoid.

If you consider, or are worried about, your teenager being rebellious, troublesome, or untrustworthy, the language you use will often reflect your fears and assumptions. Comments and instructions will be couched in negative language, with excessive use of words like “don’t”, “stop”, “never”, and “no”.

Adults whose instructions to teens are constantly negative not only come across as nagging and authoritarian, but also are more likely to produce the very behavior they are trying to prevent.

Choosing to use positive rather than negative forms of expression can make a genuine difference. Focusing on the desired positive outcomes, rather than unwanted negative outcomes reshapes what teenagers hear and hence what they focus on.

Similarly being more willing to praise and affirm rather than criticize and pick on teen performance is important. Teens are usually very aware of their own shortcomings and failures. However they are less able to see what they do well. Some adults believe a job well done is its own reward. While this might be true, there is nothing that encourages a teenager more than the positive feedback of an adult.

Positive instructions and genuine encouragement can significantly change a teen’s outlook and behavior.

Minimizing the Problem

Perspective makes a big difference. The way an adult perceives a problem is often very different to the way a teen perceives the same problem. As adults we have lived through the many trials and tribulations of adolescence. What appears like a major life altering decision to a 14 year old often looks a lot less significant to a 40 year old.

Trying to offer a broader perspective to a teenager with the intention of helping them through a tough time can be counter productive, simply because teenagers cannot take on an adult’s perspective. Developmentally they are not yet proficient at being able to take on another person’s point of view. Experientially they have not experienced life on the other side of many problems so are unable to see the situation as anything other than life changing.

All a teenager perceives when adults try to put their perspective on a problem is “you don’t get me” or “you not taking me seriously” or “you don’t think this important, therefore I’m not important.”

Some typical examples of adults trying to be helpful with their own perspective include:

“It isn’t really that bad.”

“In five years you won’t care about any of this stuff.”

“There will be others.”

While the adult perspective may be the one closer to reality, the effect on the teenager is to minimize their opinion, which leaves them feeling misunderstood and isolated.

Not Adjusting Expectations

The challenge of negotiating the path to adulthood is challenging enough for teens without having adults who refuse to acknowledge that they are growing up making it harder.

As adults, and particularly parents, it is easy to view our kids as always younger than they are. It can be hard to admit that they are growing up. But as teens get older they need opportunities to take on more responsibility and independence. Adults who continually enforce boundaries and rules that do not acknowledge age or demonstrated capacity for independent and responsible behavior can frustrate and alienate teens.

Adults are better served by stopping and considering before saying ‘no’ to a request. Be prepared to compromise when negotiating boundaries and rules with your teenager.

Ask yourself if your teenager now old enough or responsible enough for you to say ‘yes’ to situations you may have said “no” to in the past?

Fighting Battles That Don’t Need Fighting

Adolescence is a time in life that can generate increased conflict levels. Adults do themselves no favors by escalating tensions over issues that in the scheme of things may not be worth it.

There are obviously issues on which parents and adults need to be willing to hold firm no matter the level of conflict which may result. However is an issue of physical safety as important as the state of a bedroom?

Identifying matters that have room for negotiation and compromise can be an important strategy in reducing the level and frequency of conflict during the teenage years. Teaching and modeling good negotiating techniques and finding compromise are important skills to pass on to teens.

5 Common Mistakes with Teen Communication
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