

Parent/Child Communication

How to Talk So Your Parents Will Listen

Children and Teenagers:

Do you sometimes feel like your parents don't understand you? Do they sometimes seem uninterested in the things that are meaningful to you? When they ask you questions, does it feel like you're on trial? Does it seem like they find fault with everything you do?

Before you write them off, consider this: Talking with your parents isn't really very different from talking with your friends.

Think about it. The friends you like the most probably are honest with you, show up on time when you have someplace to go, know when to back off because you need some space, and don't try to act like people they're not. So you respect who they are, care about them and like to be around them.

Parents and teenagers can have the same kind of relationship. If there seems to be a breakdown in communication with your parents, try these suggestions:

- Say what you mean, and be specific. Don't say, "I hate French. The teacher's a jerk, and everyone is flunking," if what you're really trying to say is, "I know this will upset you, but I got my French grade today, and it's terrible."
- Try not to be defensive. If your mom asks what time you'll be home, don't assume she thinks you're sneaking around or doing drugs. She is probably concerned about your well-being, and knowing you'll be home at a certain time eases her worry when you're not at home.
- The same theory applies to your dad. If he asks you who's driving you to the concert, don't assume he thinks all your friends are irresponsible and so are you. Knowing where you'll be and who you're with makes it easier for him to give you more freedom.
- Give your parents a chance to think things over. It isn't fair to ask for something you want if you need an answer immediately. Allowing extra time also shows your parents that you think the issue is important enough to deserve attention from them.
- Don't put your parents in the position of guessing what is important to you. Tell them and make sure you think things over first. If everything you bring up seems crucial, your parents will be confused about your priorities.
- Try to pick a time to talk that is good for you and for your parents. If they can't talk to you at that moment, it doesn't mean they're not interested. Ask them to suggest a time that's better for both of you.
- Introduce your parents to things you enjoy. For example, if there's a new group whose music you like, ask them if they want to hear it. Tell them why you think it's great. It will be a refreshing change for your parents to learn from you.
- Give a copy of this to your parents. It might help them to see things more the way you do.

Parents:



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Does it seem that your kids and you have nothing in common? Do you have more conflict than cooperation? Is every question treated like an invasion of privacy? Do you feel they don't appreciate or respect you?

Before you despair, consider this: It's normal for teenagers to feel rebellious or to intensify situations beyond what seems reasonable to you.

These years are difficult for your child because they leave behind the ease and security of childhood to explore the freedoms of adulthood. They won't always know how to talk with you, but they need you to listen.

Teenagers make mistakes simply because they lack experience. It's like starting a new job. You don't know exactly how things are done at the new place, the work itself may be tougher and unfamiliar to you, and you're unsure whether you'll live up to expectations.

If there seems to be a breakdown in communication with your teenager, try these ideas:

- Make time for talking. Establish a point in your day when your child knows you are available.
- Try to relate to your child's perspective. For example, "Nothing's bothering me" can really mean, "I want to try and handle this on my own." "I hate you" might simply mean "I'm angry." As an adult, you have more responsibility to make communication work.
- Don't piggyback complaints when you're upset or angry. If your son is late getting home, don't criticize the friends he hangs out with. It's easier to deal with one issue at a time.
- Don't make rules that you won't enforce or threats that you won't keep. It damages your credibility and can encourage your child to test your limits.
- Try not to be judgmental, defensive, accusing or negative when your child is trying either to tell you something or to answer a question. Don't interrupt, correct grammar or do two things at once. These are all signals that you aren't really interested.
- Show concern for your child's feelings. This can go a long way toward earning trust.
- Pay attention to behaviors as well as words. Sometimes the words sound okay, but something else doesn't seem right. Trust your instinct. It might take extra effort to draw your child out.
- Try not to say things you don't really mean, even in the heat of an argument. You can't take words back.
- Try to balance your concern with faith in your child. The years you invested in your relationship haven't been lost on them.
- Give a copy of this to your child. It might help your child see things a little more the way you do.

Communication between children and their parents is often difficult. Fortunately, Bradley Hospital has the staff and resources to help. We have individual, group and family therapy designed to improve communication within the family.

A certain amount of difficulty in keeping communication lines open between parents and children is normal. However, if things seem overwhelming, call us.

Call Bradley anytime: 401-432-1000.