

8 TIPS TO GET YOUTH TO OPEN UP



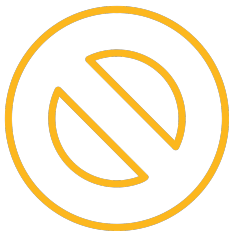
1. STEP BACK AND STOP TALKING

Sometimes direct questions aren't the best way to get teens talking; you just need to give them the time and space to come to you. You may find that this happens when you're driving in the car together, or when you're both in the same room doing different things. Out of the blue, your teen may mention something—something that happened that day or something that's on their mind—and this could be the start of a good conversation. If they don't approach you, ask how their day is going, and listen.



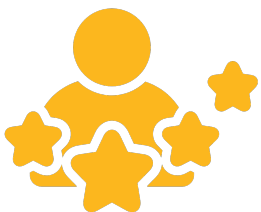
2. LISTEN FOR THE EMOTIONS

Is your teen describing something that made them upset? Are they telling you about a situation they don't know how to handle? Listen for the emotions and validate them. Don't minimize their feelings and tell them they shouldn't feel that way. Say, "yes, that does sound frustrating" (or whatever the emotion is), and then stop talking. Leave space for them to hear your validation. If they feel you are really listening empathetically, they will likely tell you more about the situation.



3. DON'T SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS FOR THEM

Even if you went through the exact same situation when you were younger, or even if you think you know the best way to solve the problem, now is not the time to jump in with your solution. One of the most important jobs of being a teenager is becoming more independent and learning how to navigate life's challenges on their own. The last thing teens want to hear is their parent's (or another adult's) quick fix. On the other hand, if your teen asks you directly for your advice, you can certainly give it, although you should be mindful of not being too didactic. Make it a conversation rather than a lecture.



4. SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE (IF IT'S RELEVANT)

This can be a fine line to walk—because you don't want to sound like you're trying to solve their problems for them—but if you did happen to go through a very similar experience when you were a teen, by all means share your memories. Just make sure it's welcome (i.e., your teen is interested), and be sure to frame it in a way that's personal to you (e.g., this is what happened to me, and this is how I felt about it at the time). You don't want your teen to hear the story as a thinly veiled lecture about how they should handle their own situation.



WE ARE #BIGGERTOGETHER

5. HOLD THE JUDGEMENT



The teen years are a time of increased independence, new experiences, and occasional experimentation in different realms. It is normal for kids of this age to try different ways of being in the world, and with this comes the inevitable mistakes. Try to hold the judgment and keep your emotions in check. Chances are, your teen realizes they made a mistake—and they're feeling pretty bad about it already. Your first order of business should be to make sure your teen is safe; after that, talk to them about how they feel and what they think they should do. Problem-solve together and make this a learning experience. Let them know how it made you feel, but avoid judgement through emotion.

6. EXPLAIN WHY



If you have to lay down the law and tell them they're not allowed to go to the party at their friend's house after the football game, explain your rationale. They might not agree, and they almost certainly will not be happy about it, but at least they'll know you made your decision thoughtfully. No one likes to feel like their lives are being controlled, but if you explain why you're worried or why you don't think it's a good idea, they'll (hopefully) appreciate that at least you're not being capricious. And you never know—it's possible that they're secretly glad you came to the decision you did. Perhaps they also had concerns about the party but didn't want to let on with their friends. Sometimes it's handy to have the old "my stick-in-the-mud parents won't let me" excuse.

7. NOTICE THE GOOD STUFF



Sometimes we're so focused on what we're worried about or what we think our teen is doing wrong that we forget to notice the good things. Did they clear their dinner dishes without being asked? Help their younger sibling with homework? Improve their grade in one of their classes at school? Take a moment to tell your teen you noticed, and that you appreciate their actions or accomplishments.

8. CARVE OUT FAMILY TIME



Whether it's regular family dinners, weekly game or movie nights, or fun weekend outings, try to create rituals around family time. Yes, everyone is busy and the calendar is jam-packed, but spending relaxed time together on a regular basis will help maintain and strengthen the family bonds. If you're regularly enjoying meals together, laughing at silly TV shows together, or doing other activities together, chances are that your teen will feel more comfortable talking to you when those thorny issues come up in their lives.