



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

Communicating with Teenagers

A typical exchange between a parent and a teenager can often look something like this; Parent: *'How was school?'* Teenager: *'fine'* Parent: *'What did you do?'* Teenager: *'Nothing'* Parent: *'You couldn't have done nothing?'* Teenager: *'oh whatever'* and walks off.

Communicating with your teenager can feel as painful as pulling teeth. Long gone are the days when they ran out the school gates bursting to tell you all about what happened in the playground and their latest school project that they want help with.

All this changes as they get older. Part of becoming a teenager and their own unique individual involves them separating from the family. As they move towards independence they are working out how much information to share with you and how much to keep private and to themselves. Although separating from the family is a natural and normal process, it does not mean disconnecting from you entirely. Remaining involved in your teenager's life is extremely important at this time in order to continue to be an influence in their lives. Keeping the channels of communication open allows you as a parent to continue to pass on your values to them and hopefully to be the voice in their head when they find themselves in difficult situations.

Listening is a powerful tool for communication. Yet teenagers complain that they never feel heard. I wonder if there is some truth to that. Take a moment now and think about the last time you were having a conversation with your teenager....it may have been a simple conversation or you may have been talking about something more serious. Now ask yourself, was I really listening, did I actually hear what my teenager was saying to me or was I miles away thinking about all the things I had to do over the weekend, or was I trying to fix the situation for them, make them feel better, without really listening to what they were feeling....

A lot of the time we do not actually listen. Life is busy and at times full of worries and stresses. We also do not like to see someone we love and care about hurting and so rush in to ease their pain, without stopping to really hear what's behind that pain.

Take another moment now and I'd like you to think of a time when you spoke to someone about something that was important to you; it might have been something you were proud of or something that upset you. Now think of what qualities that person had and what they did that allowed you to feel listened to And the next time you are having a conversation with your teenager use those same skills and qualities.

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