



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

The Relationship Bank Account

How often have you felt annoyed and irritated with your teenager? How often have you complained to them about not cleaning their room, arguing with their siblings or not coming home on time? And you are not the only one with complaints, teenagers have a list of their own that includes you never knocking on their door, not listening to them, asking too many questions and never letting them go anywhere. Getting along with each other during these years can be quite a challenge; however the good news is that it's not impossible.

Let's think of it as a bank account – a relationship bank account. Like any bank account you make deposits and withdrawals on a regular basis. Deposits strengthen and improve the relationship and withdrawals can hurt and weaken it. Therefore good relationships are always in credit, making more deposits than withdrawals.

Making Deposits

Every time you say or do something positive to or for your teenager you are making a deposit. As everyone is different, it's safe to say that what is a deposit for you in your relationship with your teenager (siblings not arguing and chores being done without world war three breaking out for example) may not be a deposit for them. I regularly ask teenagers what kind of deposits would help them in their relationships with their parents and here are some of their responses: that their parents would respect their privacy, that they would trust them. Teenagers also say that it feels good for them when they feel that their parents are proud of them and things they do. They also like to hear compliments from parents or noticing and thanking them for even simple little things they may do around the house. Other examples of deposits can include listening, understanding what's important to them and spending time together (doing what they enjoy). There are many deposits and if you are not sure what a deposit is for your teenager, you could always ask. You might be surprised by what you learn!

By making deposits you enter their world, show love, concern and empathy. Deposits are not about giving them everything they want; they are about letting them know that they are important to you. By doing this you may find that they will begin to do the same for you and make deposits (ones that matter to you) into the relationship bank account. Before you know it they may be loading the dishwasher without being asked or if things are going really well, making you a nice cup of tea so you can sit back and relax.

Relationships are not easy but one deposit at a time and you are on your way to getting along better with your teenager.

Clare Crowley Collier, Therapist, Educator & Facilitator for Teenagers and Parents