



ParentsPlus

Adolescents Programme

PARENT BOOKLET

An evidence-based parenting course promoting effective communication and positive relationships in families with adolescents aged 11 to 16 years.

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Connecting with your Teenager

- ➔ Staying connected with your teenager means there are regular times when you chat and communicate together.
- ➔ This does not mean you have to always have 'serious or deep conversations' or for your teen to reveal their innermost secrets to you (in fact it is important for teenagers to have some privacy).
- ➔ Staying connected means having simple ordinary conversations with your teenager about their interests and what is going on in their lives.

Take an Interest in Your Teenager's World

As a parent it is important to be regularly chatting and talking with your children. Be genuinely interested in your teenagers and all they do. You want to know them, not because you want to control them, but because you genuinely want to get to know their world. You want to know their opinions, views and feelings. You want to understand what matters to them, what they love to do and what they are worried about.

What do Teenagers Think About?

So what do teenagers think about? What issues are important to them and what concerns press upon their minds? Below are the sorts of worries that teenagers have reported as most concerning them:

- ➔ Will I make friends or will anyone like me?
- ➔ Will anyone fancy me or ask me out?
- ➔ How come I don't fit in with others?
- ➔ What should I do about drugs and alcohol?
- ➔ Will I do okay in the class exams?
- ➔ Will I ever get a decent job?
- ➔ What should I do with my life?
- ➔ How can I please my parents/get them off my back?

Teenagers also tend to have strong views about how they should be parented and about what they want from their parents:

- ➔ They want their parents to trust them and have faith in them.
- ➔ They want privacy. They want to talk to their parents about some things but they don't want to tell them everything.
- ➔ They want to be treated fairly. Justice and fair play are really important to them.

Get to Know the Specific Details

Parents who stay connected in their children's lives know countless ordinary details about their lives and what is important to them. They take an interest in their hobbies and make a point of remembering their friends' names. They know the position of their favourite team in the league and what their favourite dinner is. They are curious about what their children think and feel about things, especially things that are important to them. Gaining this knowledge of your child's life takes time but it really shows in the quality of interaction between parent and child.

A cup of tea

Joan would make a special effort to be available to her children when they came in from school. She would stop any work she was doing and sit down with her children over a cup of tea. She made sure there would be time and space for everyone to say how their day went. Joan made a point to ask specifically what went on for them during the day and she always remembered to ask about important things such as, football matches or trips. This special time after school became a really important family ritual that Joan and the children looked forward to.

Talk about Yourself Too

A good way of connecting with your teenager is to share details from your own life with them. As well as just asking them what they are doing, tell them what is going on in your world too. This allows them to understand you.

Talking about work

When Paul came home from work, he would ask his daughter about school and she would not tell him much but she would often ask him about his work. As she got older, he began to tell her about his job and what was going on in his day. This broke the ice and helped her open up to him about her world. She was delighted that her father confided in her and this made them more connected.

Staying connected allows you to have a positive influence

Staying connected with your teenager, not only means that you are sharing in their lives, but it gives you an opportunity to influence them positively about other important matters when they arise, such as drug taking and safety.

Worksheet: Connecting with Your Teenager

Parents who have a good relationship with their teenagers stay involved in their lives. They know the countless ordinary details about their teen's lives and what is important to them. They take an interest in their hobbies and make a point of remembering their friends' names. They are curious about what their children think and feel about things especially things that are important to them.

Twenty Questions

Go through the 20 questions below, marking the ones you can answer about your teenager:

1	What are the names of their three best friends?	
2	Which friend do they admire most and why?	
3	What is their favourite TV programme?	
4	What TV programme do they like least?	
5	What things do they laugh at?	
6	What do they look forward to during the week?	
7	What school subject is their favourite?	
8	Who are they the closest to in the extended family?	
9	What music do they like and why?	
10	Name their favourite band?	

11	What is their favourite treat?	
12	What is their favourite magazine?	
13	What is their favourite item of clothing?	
14	What dreams do they have about their lives?	
15	What are their opinions on world poverty, global warming etc?	
16	What issues do they feel really strongly about?	
17	What way would they vote if they could?	
18	What did they do yesterday?	
19	What was the best thing that happened to them last week?	
20	What is their favourite holiday?	

Find out more

- ➔ Become curious about the things you don't know yet and make an effort next week to begin to find them out.
- ➔ Remember to 'go slow' as teenagers can take time before they will tell you.
- ➔ It can be an interesting family exercise to go through the questions together, where both parent and teenager share the answers about their lives with one another.

Responding to your Teenager's Initiative

The best way to improve your relationship with your teenager is to notice any time they seek your attention and then to try to respond more positively. This does not mean that you give them everything they demand, but it does mean that you use each of their requests as an opportunity for making a connection.

Responding to your Teenager's Initiative – Examples

Responding to your teen's initiative is a case of making sure to 'seize the opportunity'. Consider the following examples:

If your son asks for help with homework and you're busy, try to give a little bit of time and then set aside another time to help.

If your daughter suddenly opens up one night because her boyfriend split up with her, this might be a time to postpone going to bed and to stay up and listen.

If your son wants to watch a favourite TV programme and you're reading, it might be a good idea to postpone your reading and to watch the programme with him.

If your daughter asks you a personal question when you're reading the newspaper, you can put down the newspaper for a few minutes and try to listen and answer the question.

If your son asks you for a lift, rather than lecturing him about 'not being his chauffeur', use the journey as an opportunity to listen and talk to him.

If your daughter asks you for extra pocket money, rather than immediately saying 'No', take time to listen to what she wants the money for. Take time to explore some ways she might get some extra money that suit you, e.g. doing the wash up first or tidying her room etc.

You don't always have to give your teen what they want

Responding to your teen's initiative does not mean you always have to give them what they want. Sometimes they make requests you can't afford and unreasonable demands which it would be unhelpful to give them (such as, requesting to go out on a school night). What does matter is that you try to listen to what they want and respond as warmly as you can. You still use an unreasonable request as a chance to connect with your teenager.

For example, if your daughter asks to go out on a school night, rather than giving a lecture about how thoughtless she is, you can take a moment:

- ➔ To listen as to why she wants to go out, and what she would like to do.
- ➔ Acknowledge how frustrating it can be sometimes not to be able to do what she wants.
- ➔ Explore something positive she can do as a reward once the study is finished.

Worksheet: Responding to your Teen

One of the greatest opportunities to connect with teenagers is to respond to any initiatives they make to talk with or connect with you.

1 When does your teenager seek your attention?

When/Where does your teenager seek your attention or ask you for something?

When are you able to respond positively? (e.g. to listen or to give them what they ask, etc.)

2 When does your teenager make demands?

When does your teenage make demands from you and it is difficult to respond positively or when you end up in a row? (e.g. asking for money)

How can you try to respond more positively to these requests?

Note: Responding positively does not mean you have to give in to an unreasonable demand. For example, if they ask for money you don't want to give, rather than giving a lecture, you can still listen carefully to their request, ask for details and then explore other ways of getting what they want (doing chores, waiting until next week etc).

3 When do you most enjoy being with your teenager?

When do you most enjoy being with your teenager? (e.g. when you have the best chats with them)

How can you increase the times these situations happen?