



Difficult Conversations With Your Teen

The 7 steps to handling difficult conversations

1. Get clear about your own morals and values.

How do you feel about 16 year olds having sex? And what is the difference between that and 18 year olds?

What do you think about kids smoking marijuana?

What do you think about underage drinking? 15,16,17?

You cannot force your morals on your children. They will learn by the example you set. Are you modelling the type of behaviour you would like to see them displaying?



2. Educate yourself about the issues you want to discuss with your kids.

Get on the Internet & look up current trends

Be up to date

Get savvy with their language

3. Make time to talk

Don't wait too long to have these conversations

Watch movies together and talk about them later

Acknowledge if you are anxious or nervous

Some of the best times to talk are: in the car - this means you don't have to make eye contact if you don't want to. It is often easier for a teen to discuss a difficult topic if you are not staring them down!

Another great time is when they are in bed - sit or lie next to them and ask them about their day.



4. Listen, Listen, Listen: from their point of view

Don't try to fix and solve

Don't interrupt

Don't make the conversation about you

Don't make you right and them wrong

Listen with your lips shut

Put yourself in their shoes

Research shows listening is one of the things teenagers say adults are really bad at and is one of the things they really want them to be best at!

5. Ask open ended questions

Ask only what and how questions

No "why" questions - they are too judgmental

Be curious and don't interrogate

Ask questions to explore feelings, thoughts and options

Many teens complain that parent's questioning techniques are like getting the third degree and being under the hot lights in an interrogation room. They report that this just causes them to shut down, not listen and definitely not want to talk!

6. Acknowledge thoughts feelings & complaints

This does not mean you are agreeing with them

Teens need to feel understood and heard

Although we may not agree with what they are saying it is important to the strength of the relationship that we acknowledge how they feel.

7. Make requests not demands

A request is respectful and not trying to control the other

It allows negotiation - which is very important to the teen



It lets go of external control and provides choice

When a teen feels that you are trying to control them or push them into your point of view they simply shut down or argue even more. Get out of external control and into connecting behaviours.

Some great difficult conversation starters

"I'd like to talk about _____ with you, but first I'd like to see your point of view."

"This is really hard and uncomfortable for me to speak with you about, _____ and I need to talk with you so I can understand your point of view"

"I think we have different perceptions about _____. I'd like to hear what your thoughts are on this."

"I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well."

General Conversation Starters

"What was the thing that made you laugh the most today?"

"What was the most challenging thing that happened today?"

"What interesting questions did you ask today?"

Teens tell me they want to have these difficult conversations with their parents but are often too afraid to because their parents will not listen to their point of view, will try to fix and solve or tell them how it was in "their day"! So they turn to their friends for support and often incorrect guidance. Be the best parent you can be and apply these seven steps next time a difficult topic comes up.

"They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel."

Carl W. Buechner