


Parenting Teens[®]

KNOW / GROW / BECOME


APRIL 2019

Acknowledge our feelings 

Show us we're loved

Be direct  Be honest

Be a safe place

 Don't freak out

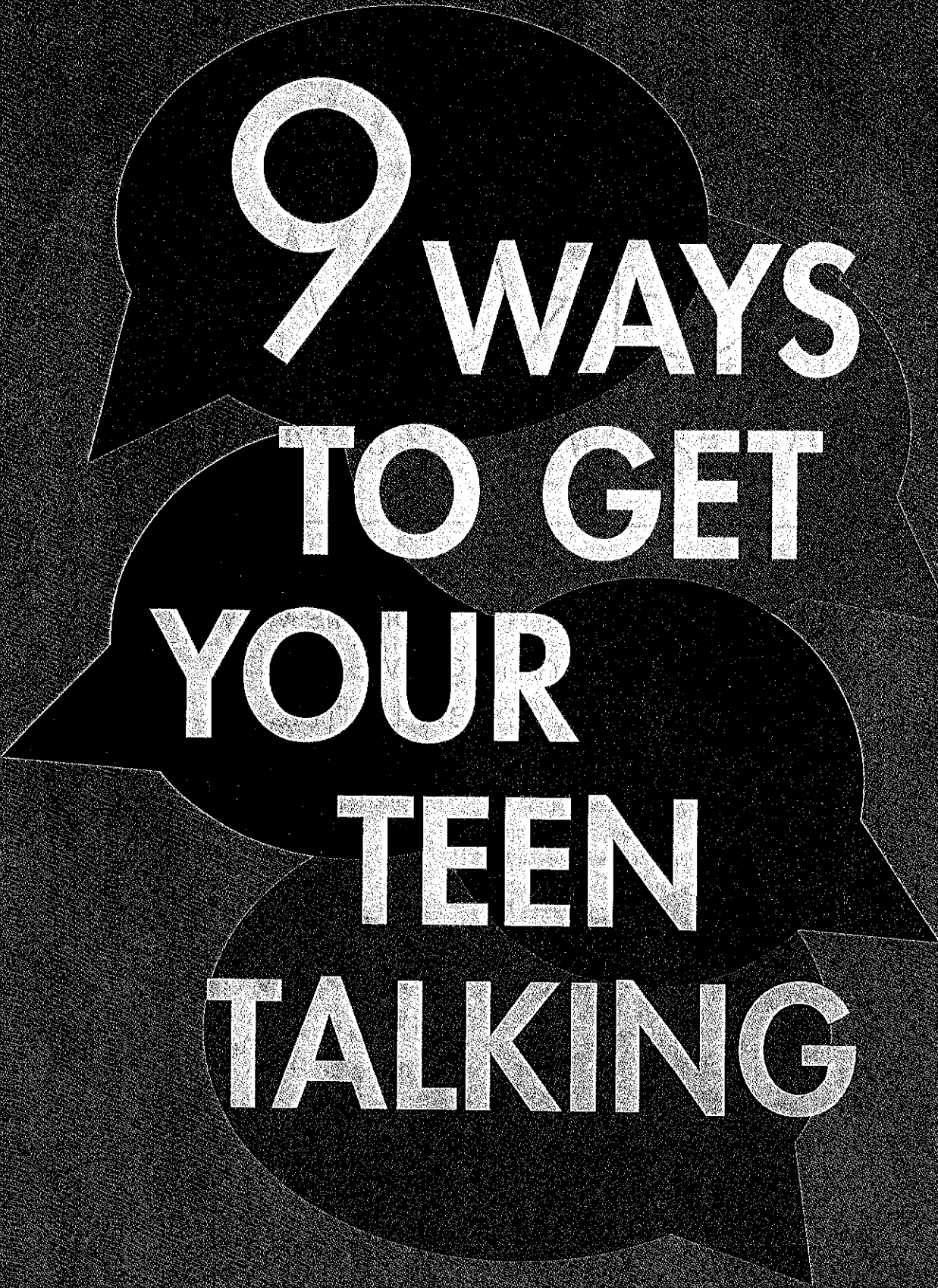
How I
want my
PARENTS
to talk to me

.....
Here's what three teens told
us they want you to say

APRIL 2019 // USA \$4.00



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9 WAYS TO GET YOUR TEEN TALKING

*Does science have an answer for why
your teen doesn't want to talk? Maybe.
How to get them to talk is a little harder.
The good news is it can be done—if
you're open and intentional.*

BY DR. ABBY HILL

Most teens seem to have no trouble at all talking to their friends, a conclusion clearly supported by your monthly cell phone bill. Yet, many don't as readily open up to adults, and especially not to their parents.

There is a biological reason that can, at least in part, explain this. Brain maturation during adolescence leads teens to realize their thoughts and feelings are their own, and it is important for them to control what they share with others. This realization is key for them in becoming a responsible and independent adult.

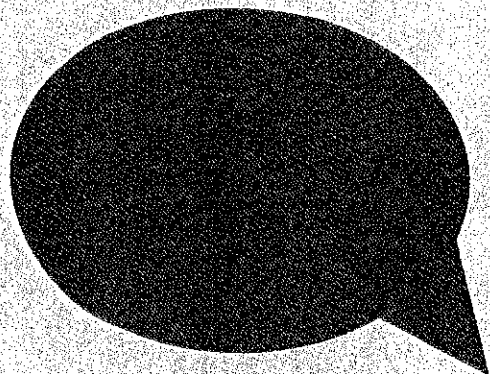
But, even with the challenges this brings to parent-teen communication, there are some ways parents can build the communication connection and increase the minutes spent talking with their teen. Here are a few.

1. Ask open-ended questions to kick start meaningful conversation with your teen.

Instead of "How was your day?" (which will likely receive an answer limited to one word), ask about something in particular you know they were handling today, like taking a big test or settling a conflict with a friend. Or, there's always "What is the best thing that happened today?" and "Tell me something funny that happened today," as go-to conversation-starters.

2. Unplug at every opportunity. No phones, yours or theirs, during real conversation time. Turn off the TV. Turn off the music. Take out the earbuds.

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If your phone does ping or ring while you're talking with your teen, overtly ignore it, sending an unspoken message to them that they are your only focus right now.

3. If you sincerely desire for your teen to respond with transparency and truth, take care to keep your own emotions in check during a difficult conversation. Teens often report that they tend to withhold negative information from their parents, not so much out of fear of punishment, but because they absolutely dread the "yelling" scene that will follow. ("Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged" -Colossians 3:21)

Sit down beside your teen during conversation, rather than standing over them, in order to convey a caring and calm presence. Listen. Breathe.

4. Respect your teen's privacy during conversations of substance. Find a time and a spot away from siblings, friends, and other family members, so that your teen will feel comfortable to talk freely.

5. Stay on point. Resist the urge to bring up past problems or conflicts during the current conversation. Avoid declarations or accusations, as these all but ensure your teen's defensiveness and "shutdown."

6. If not now, when? Don't let your teen off the hook completely when it comes to setting aside some time to talk. If they are genuinely busy, put your heads together and schedule a mutually doable future time to talk. Regular and real communication with your teen is more than a parenting "bonus." It is critical to the parent-teen bond and prepares your teen for successful and fulfilling relationships in adulthood.

7. Be real. Don't expect (or attempt) to completely address or resolve a complex issue or problem in one "meeting." Intense conversations lasting longer than 10 or 15 minutes tend to become

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counterproductive and just plain exhausting for everyone. Consider the initial conversation one of "fact-finding" and planning for the next steps.

Solving problems through talk is an active and ongoing process. Acknowledge you may not have all the answers. It's OK to respond sometimes with only "I don't know," or "I'm sorry that happened."

8. Ask your teen if they want your suggestion (advice) before you offer it. This relates back to an understanding of adolescent development and teens' increasing need for autonomy and independence.

9. End every conversation on an encouraging note, even if there are issues or problems still to be resolved. Acknowledge to your teen that you understand it's difficult sometimes to talk openly with a parent. Tell them you appreciate their willingness to participate. Remind your teen that they are constantly in your prayers. Offer to pray with them right there, on the spot.

Communication is cumulative. Having an established and ongoing relationship with your teen for all of the daily "little" things in life will help make those "big" and difficult conversations much more likely to happen and more comfortable for you and for them.

DR. ABBY HILL is a school psychologist working in schools and private practice, specializing in adolescent and college-age students. She is a state certified teacher and is on faculty at a major Christian university. Dr. Hill is an author, trainer, and presenter on parenting, education, and child mental health at schools, churches, and in the community.