

## Tips For Connecting With Your Teen



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- **Like your teen;** if your teen thinks you like them, they will communicate with you. If they think you dislike them, they will shut you out. It is imperative that you let your teen know that you like the person she is. This does not mean you have to agree with everything she does or says. Teens can deal with your disapproval, so long as they know that you *accept and love them despite their flaws*.
- **Listen to your teen,** once your adolescent is willing to stay in the room with your for longer than 15 seconds (because he knows you really want to be with him) the most important principle in communication is to listen. Stop talking and listen. Even if you don't like what you hear, listen. Somewhere in the words and sentences are reflections of what's happening in your child's heart. Is she bitter and angry all the time? Then she hurts. Does he continually talk about one or two people? Then there is a relationship you need to know about. If your objective as you communicate is to teach them a lesson, give them "a piece of your mind," or straighten them out, you will lose them. The only way to accomplish those things is to listen. Then listen again and again.

### Ways to improve your listening skills

- **Time your conversations well;** find a space in his/her world into which you can step. Meet for lunch away from school. Stay up an extra half-hour at night to talk.
- **Make eye contact;** as they talk, turn off the TV put away the magazine, stop cooking, etc. Eye contact is very intimate and hard to ignore, when you make eye contact you connect.
- **Don't interrupt;** when you interrupt your teenager, you're saying; "I don't want to hear the rest of what you're saying because either it's not important enough, or what I have to say is more important." Remember, teens are more emotionally sensitive and labile than we are. No matter how badly you want to interrupt and correct, wait. It will pay off.
- **Sit down;** sitting while you talk communicates that what your teenager is saying is important to you, that you really want to hear it.
- **Ask personal questions;** teens are egocentric and think about themselves constantly. If you persistently, gently, and sincerely ask questions, your child will respond and open up. It might not happen in two days or even two weeks, but it probably will within a couple of months.

### Connecting with your teen through intimacy

**Communication opens the door for relationships, intimacy cements them together.  
A way to think of intimacy means "INTO-ME-SEE"**

- **Magic Touch;** some parents roll their eyes when they learn that teens need physical intimacy. Touch lets teenagers know that someone sees them, someone likes them. **So when a parent, still the most important person in a teen's life,** touches them; it affects them deeply. Through physical contact, teenagers also learn self-respect, appropriate touch, body boundaries, and modesty. If you're a mother, it may feel more natural to hug your daughter, but it's equally important that you reach out to your son. Teen boys have a special need for a mother's love, and healthy touch keeps them connected to that love. If you're a father, it's just as important that you keep hugging your daughter. She needs to learn that she is to be handled gently and respectfully if she is to develop a healthy sexuality.
- **On another note;** if you find out that an adult friend or family member has touched your teen in a sexual way or even talked to him or her in a sexually provocative manner, deal with it immediately.

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**Connecting through appreciation;** appreciation is a word we use to describe our recognition of someone else's value or worth. We all need to feel valuable to the people we know and the world we live in, but teens, who naturally struggle with insecurities about their developing identities, feel this need even more keenly than other people do. Finding this sense, that they have traits and talents other people appreciate makes them feel good, acceptable, loved, and defined. Parents, especially, should do everything they can to help their adolescents feel valuable and valued. Otherwise, teens will turn to peers, media, or relationships outside the family for a sense of what makes them valuable, and as we've already seen, the answer they're likely to get can be summed up in one word: *sex*.

## Parental disapproval of Sex

**There are four main reasons teenagers have sex, and none of them are healthy or lead to good relationships**

- **For fun, excitement and thrills;** to seek out the unknown. In this situation, most teens have very limited attachments to their sexual partners, viewing him or her as an object of play. Teens who engage in *sex* strictly as a game become increasingly detached and emotionally distant from their partners.
- **To be accepted by peers and society at large;** we know that young teens typically have poor self-esteem, and that some teens opt for *sex* to bolster their sense of value. Kids who are immersed in media are particularly vulnerable to engaging in *sex* to feel accepted.
- **To have their needs met;** all teens are wired with needs for intimacy, love and a sense of their own value. When these needs are not met in meaningful ways through relationships with family and loved ones, a teen may turn to *sex* to fill those voids.
- **To lose themselves;** some teens use *sex* like a drug to blot out pain or other uncomfortable feelings. When having sex doesn't work and the pain continues or gets worse, the only way these kids know how to cope is by trying again, only harder, more frequently, and with different partners.

**Basically, teens are having sex to find something missing in their lives.  
They're desperate for a connection with the adults around them,  
primarily their parents.**

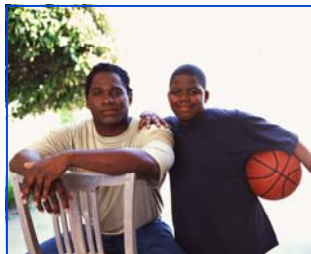
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**For parents who care for their children and want to protect them, there is perhaps no better or stronger force at their disposal than connectedness. Remember, the connection takes place on both sides of the relationship.**

**While your teens will benefit profoundly through feeling a deep sense of connection with you, you may be surprised at the sense of love, satisfaction, and vitality you will feel through your connection with them.**

**Excerpts from: Your Kids at Risk, Meg Meeker, MD, copyright 2007**

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