

Tips for Interacting with Your Teenager

Building Positive Relationships and Avoiding Traps

Based on The Power of Positive Parenting by Glen Latham

Tip # 1: Be a Positive Person

Looking for a reaction/attention from parents doesn't stop before the teenage years. Be a positive person, and make sure you are attending to your teen when they are doing the right thing. Give lots of specific information about what you like ("thank you for being so quiet while I took that call, it really helped." "I noticed you working really hard on that assignment, great work."). If your teen doesn't like praise, then spend time having positive interactions. Talk about things your teen likes, watch a TV show together you can both share, or play a game. Show empathy; being a teenager isn't easy. Recognize the times when your teen's behavior is about something that is hard for them (and not about you) and let them know ("I know it's hard being away from your friends. We can talk about that later when you are feeling a little better.")

AVOID: Criticizing. If the only time your teen hears from you when they are doing something wrong, your teen will continue doing the wrong thing.

Tip # 2: Be a Brick Wall

Teenagers are going to try to argue. Teenagers are going to complain. Teenagers are going to let you know what they don't like. A teenager can't argue with a parent who isn't arguing back. Be a brick wall. If your teenager tries to argue, complain, or back talk, simply restate what you said in the first place and walk away. When you're done walking away and ignoring, go back to Tip # 1.

AVOID: Arguing. Remember, a bear isn't going to eat food at an empty campsite. A teenager isn't going to argue with a parent who doesn't argue.

Tip # 3: Only Ask for Information You Want

Questions can be helpful, but questions can also be dangerous. Only ask for information that you really need ("do you have an assignment today?") or that communicates your desire to be helpful ("is there anything I can do?"). Phrase directions as statements, rather than questions, unless you want to open the door for your teen to say "no."

AVOID: Questioning. Asking why your teen did something is unproductive, opens the door for arguing and disrespect, and your teen may not even know the answer.

Tip # 4: Make Good Use of Your Time Talking

Most teenagers have already learned right from wrong from you by now. Most teenagers also ask questions they already know the answer to. Spend your time talking about what you want in simple terms ("right now I expect respectful language from everyone" or "I expect chores to be completed by noon."). State things positively, specifying what you want, versus what you don't want. Repeat Tips #1 through 3, and be aware of what you say and how you say it.

AVOID: Logic or explaining. Giving explanations for everything you ask for just wastes time, gives unnecessary attention, and delays what you wanted in the first place. Also avoid sarcasm or threats, which directly damage your relationship and interfere with your ability to be a person your teen wants to be around. Avoid pleading, which tells your teen that you are desperate.