

Building Trust in Teens

Trust is the ability to confide and believe in one's own abilities and those of others. Trust is the basis of every functional relationship. As your teen gets older, they are learning more about the role that this value plays in their relationships and finding ways to apply it to their social interactions and friendships. Your teen's ability to trust begins at home; by providing a supportive and nurturing environment, you are showing them what a trusting relationship looks like and helping them form the foundation on which their future relationships will be built.

Show your teen the importance of trust in relationships. Making your teen feel that their voice matters and will be heard is a building block for their sense of trust and validation. Talk to your adolescent regularly about their social world and interests, and acknowledge them when they act in a responsible and trustworthy manner. For instance, they may choose to stay home and study for a big test instead of going out with friends. If your teen does something to damage your trust, communicate with them clearly and firmly about why it is inappropriate, and ask them why they would do things differently in the future or provide them with suggestions about what they could do better the next time. For example, if they come home after curfew and don't answer their phone or return your texts when you're trying to find out where they are, you can ask them to make sure to let you know if they are running a bit late. Many teens are very concerned with their privacy, and if your adolescent comes to you with a concern or tells you something in confidence, try not to share it with others. They may not want to share everything with you, either, and unless you suspect that they are hiding something that could cause her harm, allow them to keep some matters private, as this will help solidify the trust between the two of you.

Talk about trust in relationships. You may also want to talk to your teen about the role that trust plays in their friendships and relationships. Discuss how important it is to be honest with friends—and that they should expect honesty in return—to help them define what a trusting relationship looks like. For instance, your teen may be upset because a friend shared an embarrassing secret with others. You can suggest that they tell their friend that they trusted him or her to keep that secret and ask him or her to not do that again. This may also help them understand that they do not need to associate with friends who are not trustworthy.

Adapted from: <https://www.today.com/parenting-guides/building-trust-teens-t179139>



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