

Hand-out for Parents

TALKING TO TEENS

EFFECTIVE PARENTING of teenagers depends on good communication. But, as many parents discover, talking to teens is not always easy. Here are some parent-teen communication tips adapted from our new booklet, *Straight Talk About Teens*.

WHAT HELPS

Nurture your relationship. Almost any positive influence you have on your child depends on a good relationship. Once kids get to be teenagers, maintaining parent-child relationships may become more challenging because teens spend less time with us and want to be independent. Try to grab as many small opportunities to spend time together as possible. Eat meals as a family. Take your son or daughter out for a lunch or coffee date. Are there sports, games or activities you both enjoy? Some parents have great talks with their teens while driving in the car.

Listen without judgment. We often feel it is our job to tell children when they are wrong or when their logic or moral reasoning are faulty. But who wants to talk to someone who usually responds with criticism? Reserving judgment some of the time can make teenagers more willing to open up to us.

Ask what they think. Asking teens for their opinions, ideas and advice gives them a clear message that we value and respect their ideas.

Be ready to listen when they are ready to talk. Teenagers aren't always eager to open up to their



parents. So when they do come to us, we need to be willing to listen even if their timing isn't very convenient.

WHAT DOESN'T

Avoid communication stoppers. Yelling, lecturing, anger, judgment and insults are not likely to get you very far. As one grade 11 student said, "If you insult and yell at your kids, it just drives them away." All parents lecture or yell at children once in awhile, but remember, these are types of communicating we try to avoid using with other adults and respond to poorly ourselves. They also model the very behaviours we'd like our teenagers to stop doing.

Don't get distracted by "attitude." If we constantly get dragged into side arguments about tone of voice and backtalk, we allow teens to distract us from the real issue at hand. Discuss backtalk and attitude another time.

For more tips about raising teenagers, check out *Straight Talk About Teens: Realistic ideas and advice for parents of older teenagers*, available through our website.

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