

Create Situations in Which You and Your Teen Will Talk More

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Many parents today find that the wonderful, close relationship they had with their elementary school child has grown more distant as their child becomes a teenager. Parents lament the loss of closeness with their child and often attribute it to “the rebellious teen years.” While it's true that the teen years are a time of growing independence for children, and an increasingly closer relationship to peers and the outside world, our fast-paced, hectic, media-filled lifestyles also add distance. Many teens today live in a world in which they come home from school to an empty house.

Working parents rush home a few hours later. Dinner is hurried onto the table and an attempt to listen to the news results while eating dinner around the television. After dinner, parents busy themselves with household chores or work brought from the office. Teens may have some homework and then may spend the rest of the evening on the phone, the internet or watching television. Not much family time happening here. If you just recognized your family, you likely feel overwhelmed by the hectic pace of your life, and you may feel saddened by the distance you feel from other family members, especially your teenager. Changing this means making opportunities to connect with your child, rather than waiting for opportunities to happen. It can mean changing lifestyle habits to create the situations in which you and your teen will talk more, trust more and grow closer. Some ways that you can do this include:

Have family dinners

This can be very difficult when the home is run by a single parent or two career couple. Coming home, making dinner and arranging everyone's schedules to be there at the same time can be impossible. However, aiming for dinner together two to three times a week sets a time to catch up on daily activities, as well as problem solving and preparing for any upcoming issues (one *child needs* ideas *for a science project*, another needs *a ride to karate lessons*) and so on. Turning off the television and minimizing phone calls during dinner is very important. It lets everyone know that time and attention spent with one another is a top priority.

Protect your family time

Have a weekly family time to do an activity together play cards, go for a walk, play an outside game. Try to pick an activity that can allow for conversation (so if you see a movie, leave time for conversation afterwards). The time can be decided by the entire family and may vary depending on a family's schedule. Priority scheduling a weekly time to spend time together ensures that you will do it. If your teen does not come out of his or her room to spend time with the family, make their room less like its own separate apartment. Some teens have rooms with a phone, stereo, computer, television and even a mini refrigerator! This is like having a mini apartment within your house and makes it easy for a teen to have little contact with the family. Take out some of these sources of entertainment so your teen comes out to the family room to watch a show or play a game on the computer. Perhaps you'll be able to share these activities together.

Look at your schedule:

Do you spend a lot of time away from home? Do you work late or have a lot of social/church/volunteer activities in the evenings? When you are home, do you find yourself apart from the family doing activities in your room? Or spending most of your free time running the household? If so, you may need to make a change in your lifestyle. If

you participate in activities which often draw you away from home, you are missing time to connect with your child. For parents who need to work long hours to meet financial obligations, there is no easy solution. Sometimes parents must consider if they are willing to forgo "moving up the corporate ladder" to afford themselves greater flexibility in their work schedule so they can have more time with their family. Other parents must consider reducing or postponing their social or volunteer activities while their children still live at home. These can be difficult choices to make. It's important to realize that your teen (and even other family members, for that matter) may find these changes strange at first and likely will resist them.

You may have a hard time making these changes in your lifestyle too. Give it a few months before expecting any results. However, over time, your family will come to appreciate your interest in having a closer relationship with them. Your quality time with them will last a lifetime.

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