

# E ffective ways to communicate with your teenager

When asked to write this, I considered writing it based on my own experience – as I do have one myself, (Mine is of the female species and only 2 and a half years away from metamorphosing into an adult.) who despite all the odds against us – having moved overseas to a Western culture from an Asian background and being from a divorced family, turned out to be a responsible and very delightful young lady, but then after speaking to fellow parents and teens, I decided it would be more accurate if I collated their opinions.

I conducted a small survey and my findings were somewhat consistent.

Everyone agreed that rebelling is what they will resort to everytime we get the communication wrong.

And that the best way to “be” with them is to be their friend.

Communication is not what you say but what is understood by the other person, and it is our responsibility as the parent to choose the medium and the tone that our teenager responds best to.

Communication is most part the tone, body language, and the rapport established, and only a small part is the actual words. So it is often not what you say, but HOW you say it. It depends on what tone you use to talk to them verbally. When they are treated like a child, they are more likely to rebel than when they are treated as an equal, or given some respect.

The male variety I have been told are more prone to clamming up and not talking at all, though both sexes are capable of this behaviour.

One very effective way when all else fails, to invoke a response from your less than talkative teenager is to resort to their mode of communication – facebook, MSN or sms. In this day of technology and abbreviated communication, our temperamental teenagers are better able to type their thoughts down than to utter them verbally. So, if you are not already tech-savvy, get your teen to set up your msn and facebook tonight. It is not “Live” and allows them to absorb it before they react. We as the adult have to learn and practice the art of responding rather than reacting, all the time. When we react to them, again we are back tracking as they will react too and will rebel. However, the preferable approach is to carefully think and choose a response that will not hurt or undermine them.

Many of us have been guilty of saying - "talk to me!!" and then "blowing up" at a teen when what they say is not what you want to hear.

Once they have reached this age, it is virtually too late to teach them values, that should have hopefully been well instilled when they were younger. Straight cut military kind of approaches often backfire, and would cause them to rebel.

We have to understand what they're going through with the changing times - things are ever changing and not what they were when we were growing up, eons ago. It is a difficult time for them as there are many changes taking place within a teen, both physically and emotionally, they are just becoming aware of their sexuality whether we like it or not, they are attracted to the opposite sex, they want to feel significant and responsible, they are changing and learning to catch up with the changes in themselves and their friends.

Teens need to test limits themselves so planting awareness seeds rather than dictating would be the best way to go.

Below are some basic do's and don'ts to use with your teenager and take heart, thank God, it only lasts a few years.

# Do...

Share stories about your teen years – this gives them the courage to tell you things about their lives. Even the terrible things you did.

Ask if your teenager is seeking advice and if the answer is "no", then respect that. Always let your teen know you are prepared to offer suggestions and advice upon request but don't assume that it is always needed or wanted.

Be their friend

Be there for them

Let them know that they have your love and support no matter what

Let them know that they can trust you

Treat them with respect

Give them some responsibilities and make them feel valued

Practice what you preach - lead by example

Praise them near others. Eg my daughter is so organized. It will reinforce that behaviour.

Be their friends rather than an authority figure

Show love & affection

Let them know that they are your main concern

Constantly talk to them, keep track of them & at the same time notice if anything is bothering them

Encourage them to spell out their thoughts

Always acknowledge their good behaviour

Give them SPACE, Give them a lot of space

Make sure they know that you are always on their side, no matter what.

Explain and rationalize - not just impose rules

Be a friend to them. Teach them by examples and personal life experiences like a story. Don't let them think u are teaching but just chatting.

Celebrate and make a big deal of their successes

Participate in the activities that they enjoy to create time and space to interact and just have fun. It makes you their equal (not quite – they will probably kick your \*\*\*\* at whatever the activity may be) but this is a great opportunity for them to break the parent/kid barrier and maybe communicate to you as they would their friends.

Listen listen listen, do not interrupt and do not judge, not with your words, or your facial expressions or your grunts.

## Don't...

Judge them

Make them feel like your against them

Treat them like children

Push them too hard or put too much pressure on them

Try to control them

let them push you around

spoil them

spy on them or breathe over their shoulders. You have to trust them.

shout at them no matter what, especially when there are problems, just try to solve it first, then talk to them later.

Criticize

say ' i told u so' even if its true and u are dying to say it.

discredit their perspective however silly it may seem to us - it may be very significant to them.

lecture or nag

force your will or your opinions upon them coz they'll rebel and will not respect you

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