

Connecting with your Teenager

- ➔ Staying connected with your teenager means there are regular times when you chat and communicate together.
- ➔ This does not mean you have to always have 'serious or deep conversations' or for your teen to reveal their innermost secrets to you (in fact it is important for teenagers to have some privacy).
- ➔ Staying connected means having simple ordinary conversations with your teenager about their interests and what is going on in their lives.

Take an Interest in Your Teenager's World

As a parent it is important to be regularly chatting and talking with your children. Be genuinely interested in your teenagers and all they do. You want to know them, not because you want to control them, but because you genuinely want to get to know their world. You want to know their opinions, views and feelings. You want to understand what matters to them, what they love to do and what they are worried about.

What do Teenagers Think About?

So what do teenagers think about? What issues are important to them and what concerns press upon their minds? Below are the sorts of worries that teenagers have reported as most concerning them:

- ➔ Will I make friends or will anyone like me?
- ➔ Will anyone fancy me or ask me out?
- ➔ How come I don't fit in with others?
- ➔ What should I do about drugs and alcohol?
- ➔ Will I do okay in the class exams?
- ➔ Will I ever get a decent job?
- ➔ What should I do with my life?
- ➔ How can I please my parents/get them off my back?

Teenagers also tend to have strong views about how they should be parented and about what they want from their parents:

- ➔ They want their parents to trust them and have faith in them.
- ➔ They want privacy. They want to talk to their parents about some things but they don't want to tell them everything.
- ➔ They want to be treated fairly. Justice and fair play are really important to them.

Get to Know the Specific Details

Parents who stay connected in their children's lives know countless ordinary details about their lives and what is important to them. They take an interest in their hobbies and make a point of remembering their friends' names. They know the position of their favourite team in the league and what their favourite dinner is. They are curious about what their children think and feel about things, especially things that are important to them. Gaining this knowledge of your child's life takes time but it really shows in the quality of interaction between parent and child.

A cup of tea

Joan would make a special effort to be available to her children when they came in from school. She would stop any work she was doing and sit down with her children over a cup of tea. She made sure there would be time and space for everyone to say how their day went. Joan made a point to ask specifically what went on for them during the day and she always remembered to ask about important things such as, football matches or trips. This special time after school became a really important family ritual that Joan and the children looked forward to.

Talk about Yourself Too

A good way of connecting with your teenager is to share details from your own life with them. As well as just asking them what they are doing, tell them what is going on in your world too. This allows them to understand you.

Talking about work

When Paul came home from work, he would ask his daughter about school and she would not tell him much but she would often ask him about his work. As she got older, he began to tell her about his job and what was going on in his day. This broke the ice and helped her open up to him about her world. She was delighted that her father confided in her and this made them more connected.

Staying connected allows you to have a positive influence

Staying connected with your teenager, not only means that you are sharing in their lives, but it gives you an opportunity to influence them positively about other important matters when they arise, such as drug taking and safety.