

## Ideas for Improving Parent-Teen Communications

from the American Counseling Association

If there's a teenager in your house, odds are pretty good there are also communication issues. Parents want to know what their teens are doing, thinking and feeling, but often all they hear are grunts, complaints or single-word responses.

Most parent-teen communication issues derive from a teen's desire to be more independent. A ten-year-old may share all the highs and lows of the day's events, but a fifteen-year-old knows not telling all is a way to be more independent, while avoiding parental criticism, judgment and advice.

There's no easy fix to this communication gap, but you can make it less problematic.

Start by accepting that your teen will talk to and share feelings with friends more than with you. Why? Friends are usually less critical, less judgmental and more likely to be facing similar issues. And friends don't try to parent, but you do.

While you can't give up your parenting role, you can tone it down a bit to encourage more communication. Start by investing time in your teen's friends, music, video games, TV and other interests. Be open to inviting your teen's friends to the house and actually listen to some of your teen's favorite music.

You don't have to like any of it, or even those friends, but you want to demonstrate that you understand and respect your teen's choices.

You also want to offer communication opportunities. Yes, that means being available and actively asking questions, but it also means learning to listen. When your teen has something to say, don't immediately offer advice or criticism. Instead, show you really understood what was said. Giving your opinion or suggestions without being asked will often just shut down communication again.

As parents, we want to protect our children and help them learn to evaluate situations, make decisions and face the consequences. When your teen realizes that you respect him or her as a person, and that you're willing to allow his or her own decisions, you're more likely to find that your advice is actively sought when he or she confronts a difficult or confusing situation.

The goal is for your teen to see you not just as a parent but also as someone who respects him or her and is willing to listen without giving instant advice or commands. Achieve that and teen-parent communications should begin to improve.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

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