

Communicate to stay connected to your teenagers



Last month's topic was helping your kids stay connected to God. This month, we turn to parent-teen communication, which is notorious for breaking down. But it doesn't have to be that way. With some insight, strategy, and patience, you can keep the lines of communication open with your teenagers, who need you now more than ever.

Most importantly, you must be willing to work hard at really communicating. Because language is always changing, what adults say and what kids hear—and vice versa—sometimes aren't close to the same thing. Be ready to hear things you aren't so sure you want to hear, and listen without getting ahead of yourself when you don't know how to respond.

Although it's a cliché, communication really is a two-way street. The more honest and transparent you are, the more your kids will open up. Maintain an "open door" policy about any and all topics. Instead of pushing for information, share fun activities together so your teenagers feel comfortable about opening up. And assure them that you'll keep what they say private.

Listening well to your teenagers shows that you respect their feelings and value their opinions, even if you don't agree with them. Read on for helpful ideas about keeping the lines of communication open.

Question-asking guru Les Christie offers these tips for strong communication:

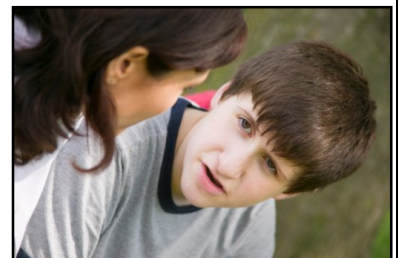
1. Start with nonthreatening, easy, open-ended questions. Ask questions that have more than one right answer, not closed questions, which are leading or limiting.
2. Remember that feelings aren't right or wrong; they just are. Stifle the inclination to shut down, neutralize, or "solve" most negative feelings. Give kids the freedom to say things that may not make sense.
3. Give kids enough time to respond. Remember the advice in James 1: 19 to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Don't be afraid of silence. Learn from it.
4. Ask follow-up questions without evaluating. Vary your response pattern, using reflection, summarizing, probing, and comparing and contrasting.
5. Don't ask questions if you aren't ready to listen. Resist the temptation to stop listening when you anticipate what kids are about to say. Listen with your eyes and your heart.

(Group Magazine)

Pulse

Check out these communication stats:

- In a survey of 20,000 Christian teenagers, most kids listed "hangout time with parents" as their number-two priority (behind developing a relationship with God).
(Group Magazine)
- On average, it takes eight seconds for our brains to process a question and formulate a response.
- Parents eager to stay in touch with their teenagers should consider learning how to send text messages. Nearly one out of three kids ages 12 to 17 sends more than 100 text messages a day. The average adult sends just 10 a day.
(Pew Research Center)
- In a study of 3,000 teenagers and their parents, 79% of parents interviewed thought they were communicating with their kids. But 81% of the teenagers said their parents weren't communicating with them.
(University of Michigan)



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Connect with your kids by asking these questions:

1. What are the most important requirements for good communication? What often gets in the way of it?
2. What can happen when communication breaks down? How can people restore good give-and-take?
3. How would you rate our family's communication skills? What do we need to work on the most, and why?
4. How can you tell when someone's really listening to you? How does that make you feel, and how does it affect your relationship?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Communication lines stay open between you and your teenagers as they grow.
2. God will help you be an active listener who strives to understand what your kids are saying.
3. You can use good communication to resolve family conflicts.
4. God will help you effectively communicate your love—and his love—to your teenagers.

Verse of the Month

"Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!" (Romans 12:16)

God places people in families so they can nurture and support each other. One way we do this is by communicating our experiences, thoughts, and feelings. When family members feel free to express themselves and truly listen to one another, homes are more harmonious.

Going Deeper

Youth ministry veteran Jim Burns discusses strong communication at SimplyYouthMinistry.com:

The healthier the family, the more effective the communication. When communication fails, it usually isn't because of the content but rather the relationship. If we didn't grow up with good role models, we're at risk for passing poor communication skills to our kids. Use these strategies to build healthy communication and relationships.

Actively listen. Listening communicates value, significance, and worth. Good listening skills include giving someone your undivided attention, maintaining an accepting and open attitude, looking past words to notice tone and body language, using reflective and respectful questioning to clarify your understanding, and giving appropriate verbal responses to what's being communicated.

Learn and use love languages. In *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman identifies ways people prefer to be loved: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Most of us have a primary love language, but they all can be important to good communication and relationships.

Communicate honesty and integrity. The parent who tries to come across as perfect is making a big mistake. Believe it or not, apologies improve communication. Let your kids know you're human. Admitting your mistakes promotes sharing and removes barriers to real communication.

Work through conflicts. Conflict can either block communication or be a path to greater understanding. A natural inclination is to get defensive when conflicts arise. The better approach is being open to learn and assuming responsibility. Working through conflict takes greater emotional involvement, but it's the loving way to care for yourself and your teenagers.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Aguilera, 29, got her start in 1993 alongside Britney Spears on the squeaky clean The New Mickey Mouse Club. Her breakout hit was the 1999 song "Genie in a Bottle." Aguilera has become one of the decade's most successful artists, selling more than 42 million albums.

Albums: Bionic (2010), Back to Basics (2006), Stripped (2002)

What Parents Should Know: "Xtina" has abandoned any trace of modesty. With each new album and video, she pushes the limits of skin and sexuality. Motherhood has done nothing to stop that, as Aguilera's recent performance at the MTV Movie Awards proved.

What Aguilera Says: "People want to see a white, blonde girl stick to a safe, good-girl image. Not that I'm trying to be the bad girl; I just want to be real, to be myself. People don't really know who I am yet."

Discussion Questions: What's the allure of behaving badly? Have you ever been accused of being a goody-two-shoes? Was that a source of pride or pain? Explain. Read aloud Psalm 8:3-8. How do these verses affect your self-image? Why is a positive self-image important? What does our self-image say about our relationship with God?

Christian Artist

Background: Needham, 24, released his first album, For Freedom, independently in 2005. Then he was able to sign with Inpop and release his major-label debut in 2006. Needham's latest album—an infectious mix of rock, soul, blues, and hip-hop—rocketed to No. 1 on the Digital Album charts.

Albums: Nightlights (2010), Not Without Love (2008), Speak (2006)

What Parents Should Know: While other artists are trying to make more of themselves, Needham is committed to making less of himself—by glorifying and exalting God. He's also passionate about evangelism. While attending Texas A&M, Needham was co-leader of a street-ministry team.

What Needham Says: "God has chosen to make us participants in this great work of evangelism. ... We are sitting on the greatest and sweetest news in the universe, the only hope for a lost and dying world, and we're telling no one about it!"

Discussion Questions: Is it easy or difficult for you to talk about God? Explain. What makes you hesitant or eager to do so? Does it ever feel urgent for you to tell your friends about God? Why or why not? Read aloud 2 Peter 3:7-10. Why doesn't Jesus tell us when he'll return? Does that change your views about sharing your faith? Why or why not?

FILMWATCH

Movie: Salt (releases July 23)

Genre: Action adventure

Rating: Not yet rated

Synopsis: CIA operative Evelyn Salt (Angelina Jolie) has just been accused of being a Russian spy. She has to use all her training and skills to prove her innocence, but the journey only clouds the mystery of Salt's identity.

Discussion Questions: Tell about a time you've been falsely accused of something. Did you protest the accusation? try to prove your innocence? Explain. Is there any way to keep people from lying about you? Why or why not? Read aloud Job 27:1-6. Is it possible—or realistic—to live by Job's standards? Why or why not? How might such a lifestyle affect what people think and say about you?



