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# FAMILY MEDIATION ASSOCIATES



## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEENS SO THEY WILL LISTEN!

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Teenagers have never been easy on their parents. On the road to becoming adults, teens are naturally inclined to take risks, experiment, and discover for themselves what life is all about. The process of separation creates a great deal of frustration and anxiety for parents.



They know that teenagers must have room to develop the skills needed to function as independent adults—such as assertiveness, responsibility and decision making. Yet as caring parents, they can't help worrying about the safety and well-being of

their children. How much control and discipline is appropriate without alienating our teenagers? Here are parenting strategies that you may find helpful

### TALK ABOUT VALUES

Passing along a strong sense of values is one of the fundamental tasks of being a parent. Ethics don't develop in a vacuum. No matter how uncomfortable it may be, parents need to talk to their children about difficult social issues.

Timing is important. Teenagers are likely to be more receptive if, instead of sitting them down and saying "We need to talk", you bring up these issues casually. For example, a good time for these discussions is when you are driving in the car. Not only do you have a captive audience, you also avoid the need for eye contact. This can help teens feel more

comfortable. Asking "what if" questions is another way to get teens to explore difficult strategies.



Talking about experiences from your own life can be an effective tool for ice breaking if it does not turn into a lecture. People of any age avoid lectures (remember all those college classes you fell asleep in?) Be sure not to jump in too fast with your own opinions. Give your child a chance to think and talk through the issues.

Another part of transmitting values is to let teens know that they can turn to you as a

resource if they ever need help. Example: "if you're ever at a party and something happens that you're uncomfortable with, call us and we'll come pick you up—no questions asked."

### FOCUS ON WHAT IS IMPORTANT

Most teens feel compelled to try out different rules. This can be irritating and be wildering to parents. But as painful as it may be to watch, it's one way that teens need to learn to function on their own without having to consult their parents about every decision.



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Rule of thumb: don't make a fuss about issues that are reversible or don't directly threaten your child's or another person's safety. These issues include unwashed hair, a messy room, torn jeans, etc. Save your thunder for more important concerns. Safety rules need to be stated clearly and enforced consistently.



## BE WILLING TO BE UNPOPULAR

Try to accept that there will be time when your children won't like what you say-or will act as though they don't like you. Being your children's friend should not be your primary role during this time of their lives. It's important to resist the urge to win their favor or try too hard to please them. Teens will often make inflammatory statements such as "you don't understand", "I'm the only one who has to-" or the best "I'll die if you don't let me." They're trying to get you to relent and say yes when you want to say no. Hold your ground and try not to take it personally. Don't feel obliged to say no to

your children automatically. Make sure you understand how strongly you feel about a given situation and that you have the information you need to make a decision.



## AVOID ARGUING

Arguing only fuels hostility-and it doesn't get you heard. Don't feel obliged to judge everything your teen says. Retain the mutual right to simply disagree.

Never try to reason with someone who is upset-it is futile. Wait until tempers have cooled off before trying to sort out a disagreement.

Don't try to talk teens, or anyone for that matter, out of their feelings. They have a right to be hurt, angry, disappointed-just as you do. You can acknowledge someone's reaction without condoning it. This type of response often diffuses anger.

Helpful phrase; "I can see that you're really frustrated and upset. Let's talk about this more when you've cooled off."

## HELP YOUR TEENS LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE

Sometimes dealing with the consequences of their own actions inspires sensible behavior more effectively than any lecture or discussion. Although we would rather our kids not learn life's lessons the hard way, the fact is that experience can be the best and most persuasive teacher. Instead of saying "I told you so", ask questions to draw them out: "How did that feel to you? How can you avoid it in the future?" If they knew you won't mock their mistakes, they'll be more receptive to your insights .. and they'll learn to take better care of themselves.



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