

Stay Close: How to Truly Connect with Your Teen/Preteen



The Power of Simply Listening

Your teen doesn't always need solutions; they need space to express their thoughts and emotions. The goal is to show them you're there without judgment or an agenda. This helps foster connection and increases your power of influence. When we have power of influence our words, opinions and thoughts on their life matter to them.

Key Listening Skills

1. Be Fully Present

- Put away distractions (phone, TV, laptop).
- Make eye contact if comfortable for them.
- Use open body language (relaxed posture, nodding, leaning in slightly).

2. Validate Their Feelings

- "That sounds really tough."
- "I can see why you'd feel that way."
- "That makes total sense."

3. Use Reflective Listening

- Repeat back what you hear without adding your opinion.
- "You're really frustrated because you studied so hard and still didn't get the grade you wanted."
- "It sounds like you felt left out when your friends made plans without you."

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

- "What was the hardest part about that?"
- "How did that make you feel?"
- "What do you think would help right now?"

5. Hold Back on Advice

- Avoid jumping in with solutions or "fixing" the problem.
- Instead of "You should..." try "That sounds challenging. Do you want to brainstorm together?"
- Resist the urge to compare it to your own experiences—let their story stay about them.

What to Avoid

- **Giving Advice Too Soon** ❌
 - Instead: "That's a tough situation. What do you think would help?" ✅
 - **Minimizing Their Feelings** ❌
 - Instead: "I can see this is really upsetting for you." ✅
 - **Turning It Into Your Story** ❌
 - Instead: "Tell me more about what that was like for you." ✅
 - **Problem-Solving Immediately** ❌
 - Instead: "Do you want to vent, or would you like to figure out a plan together?" ✅
 - **Admonishing or Criticizing** ❌
 - If they're upset about a bad grade, avoid saying, "Well, you should have studied harder."
Instead: "It sounds like you're disappointed. What do you think might help next time?" ✅
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How to Know You're Doing It Right

- Your teen walks away feeling **understood**, not lectured.
- They **keep talking** and don't shut down.
- They **come back to you** with more later.



Remember:

The more you listen now, the more they'll trust you when they need guidance later. Stay close, stay present, and let them lead the conversation.

