

Communicating With Your Teen Redeveloping Trust and Understanding

Communicating with your teenager can be difficult under the best of circumstances. After a crisis or a challenge in your relationship, like finding out that they are using drugs or alcohol it can be even more difficult. Your communication may reach a point where both of you are on the defensive and trust has been replaced with a belief that it's impossible to communicate without it leading to anger and hurt feelings.

Do you wish you could simply push replay and go back to the way things were? Can you find a place inside of you that can be cautious and yet open to the possibility of change and realistic yet connected to the loving connection that lays beneath the armor that has been built around your love for one another?

Here are 7 Key Thoughts to keep in mind when you find yourself in that situation. They are not magic bullets but if you can commit to applying them on a regular basis you can peel away the hurt and replace it with the love that is buried beneath it.

1. LISTEN

The most important key to good communication is listening. Easier said than done though. The mind does not listen easily without filtering what it hears so listening takes focus, concentration, willingness, and curiosity. The more layers of hurt and mistrust have developed the more important it is to develop your listening muscle.

A simple measure of whether or not your really listening is to reflect on whether you're really hearing what the other is saying or preparing in your mind what you're going to say to make your point. If you find yourself preparing for what to say bring yourself back to listening.

2. BE PRESENT

Being present is the underlying skill required for good listening. Our mind tends to wander off into thoughts of what has happened before, what we believe or worry will happen tomorrow, what we will say next. When our minds go to these places there is usually a physical component to it. When we are present we feel calm, centered and focused. When we are in fear, anger, or anticipation, we feel tension in the body. It might be in the shoulders, the jaw, the muscles of the face, or in the chest. The body registers our emotions and recognizing the signs we can learn to release into the moment.

Learning breathing or centering techniques we can notice when we go away and bring ourselves back. See if you can notice how you go away in your daily conversations. Notice where in your body you feel the emotions. See if you can notice, breathe, let go, and bring yourself back. Try this with comfortable situations before trying it with highly charged interactions.

3. SEEK TO UNDERSTAND

As humans, our tendency is to want to make our own points and to have others understand us. It's a whole different ballgame when we have to put away our positions, commit to listening and understanding, and take the risk finding out that we are wrong. Research shows that in at least 95 % of difficult situations in which we are challenged or will potentially be embarrassed, we get defensive. It takes courage to put our own needs aside and be open to learning something that may change our perceptions about how things are.

When you're in conversations see if you can put aside your point of view, be fiercely curious and ask questions so that you're sure you're understand. If, even for the moment you can open yourself to the possibility of learning something that changes your paradigm, you're on the way to mutual learning that transforms both you and the other person.

4. BE COMPASSIONANITE

It takes two to move through misunderstanding and mistrust. Recognize that you are both human beings trying your best to live happy healthy and satisfying lives. We all feel pain and act in ways that we would prefer we did not. Having compassion for this shared aspect of being human is a way to build bridges to feeling closer and building trust. Even when it seems that the other is out to get us you can assume that they're doing the best they know how to get the outcomes they would like.

When you're in a difficult conversation, see if you can connect with this commonality that we all share called humanness and let go of judgment.

5. AGREE ON UNDERSTANDINGS

We all hear what we want to hear. How many conversations have you had in which you later compare your understanding of the outcome only to find out that you had different ideas about what you agreed to or what your expectations were. It's much more productive in the long run and will result in many fewer disagreements later if you strategies for developing a mutual understanding of what you've said and agreed to.

When you are in conversation ask for clarifications when you don't understand. At the end of your conversation go over the main points that you've covered and reached agreement on and write them down. Having something concrete later will help avoid rehashing disagreements that arise from not understanding and agreeing at the time.

6. FOCUS ON FEELINGS

Often, rather than talking about our feelings, we make declarations or interrogate someone else about their intentions. This happens often with parents and teens. A parent will say "I want you home for family dinner on Sunday." The teen responds with "but I have plans. I'm going to spend time with my friends". The parent responds "I

don't know why your friends are more important than your family" Why can't you make the family a priority just once?" What's left out of this conversation on the part of the parent is why would like the young person to be home. Something more than just because!

Sharing your feelings can open the way to understanding and a willingness on the part of your teen to make an exception. In the above example the parent might say "You know, I really miss having you around more. I miss having us altogether as a family now that you're older and doing more things with your friends. Let's plan a Sunday dinner together. What works for you?"

7. ACQUIRE PATIENCE

Perhaps the hardest of all. We live in a remote control world in which the worlds problems are solved during a half hour TV show. When we're involved in difficult situations that are uncomfortable for us we want the situation and our discomfort to end quickly.

Start thinking about small successes. Things didn't get difficult in a day nor will they be resolved in one day. Celebrate small steps you make in improving your relationships and give each other pats on the back for the hard work that you are both doing.

Communication can be difficult especially when feelings have been hurt or trust has been damaged. Use these tools as guidelines for finding your way back to more caring and loving relationships with those that you care about.

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