

Sharing Family Values with Teens

A key part of your communicating with your child is about your underlying values and the expectations you have for your family. Before you read any further, take some time to figure out with your partner what is important to you and what expectations and boundaries you have and how far are you willing to compromise. If you are clear about what the line in the sand is for your family choosing your battles become easier. Then, pick your spot (where no means no and you are committed to enforcing the consequences for your teen crossing that line) and stick to it. If it is clear to everyone in the family, dealing with your child, or in a more significant way, your teen, become much less emotionally charged.

When a child is small, we often use boundaries to protect them and keep them away from harm or danger. As they grow older and become teenagers, these boundaries naturally shift and change, but it's still important to maintain your boundaries so that your teen knows what kind of behavior is acceptable, and feels safe knowing that you care. As all parents know, children like to test the limits of their boundaries and teenagers are no exception. In fact, they can be particularly adept at digging their heels in when orders are given. One way to stop this happening is to let them know why something is important.

Boundaries work far better if they are made and agreed together with teenagers. When teenagers understand the reasons behind your decision, and see that you've taken their opinions into account, they may be more motivated to co-operate.

Rules can help you keep your child safe, but as they get older you will need to negotiate and let them take more responsibility for their own safety. There may be times when your values conflict with the values that your children are learning from other people and the media. This may be when you find yourself negotiating.

Talk to your teen and let them know what is important to you and why. Give them a chance to respond, and make sure you really listen. When you are genuinely willing to compromise, you may find that the conversation is much more effective, as your teen gains a sense of responsibility. Work out what is really important to you and what you could let go. Too many

boundaries can cause resentment and be impossible to maintain, so strike a balance and be prepared to re-negotiate.

Shifting gears in how you communicate with your teen can feel awkward as you, as a parent navigates the balance between their growing maturity and independence and the challenge of guiding them to make good choices. It's a given that there will be conflict, but have been working to keep the lines of communication open with your teen, the hard conversations may be easier.

- Find neutral times to talk about the big issues; for many families, a car ride to the mall to run errands is a good opportunity for such conversations.
- Give your teen a choice about participating in some family activities. Encourage them to join in, but this is a step toward independence.
- Share your own experiences, using "I" messages. Treat your teen with respect, as an equal by asking open-ended questions and listening without passing judgment.
- Practice what you preach. Teens see hypocrisy very clearly.
- Don't try to solve their problems for your teen, but help them work out a solution or make a plan of action. Check back to see how it went.
- Appreciate their positive qualities and make a point to celebrate these.
- It isn't easy when boundaries are crossed and there have to be consequences for bad decisions to make clear that your teen still has your unconditional love. Find an opportunity to make sure that your teen knows they will always have your unconditional love.

There will be conflict and everyone will be feeling strong emotions. Exercise self-awareness to manage your own reactions. Breathe deeply, and slow down to help keep in control. Now have that hard conversation with your teen.

Further Reading

Suggestions from the perspective of a 20-something:

[30 Ways to Connect with Your Teen](#)

A road map for clarifying your own family's values:

[Values Matter: Using Your Values to Raise Caring, Responsible, Resilient Children](#)

Help with holding firm with boundaries:

[Setting Boundaries with Teens: Sticking to "No"](#)

Guidance for navigating conflict with teens:

[Conflict management with teenagers](#)

A one-page reminder of 10 things that are important in parent-teen interactions:

[10 Principles for Parenting Your Teens](#)

What's the best way to find out what's going on with your teen?

[How to Listen and Get Through to Your Teen](#)