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Being a Friend and a Parent

As your teen matures, they are becoming adults, discovering themselves, and deciding who they want to be. They are struggling to move away from their parents, toward their own future, and they are trying to establish more mature relationships. This can be a very turbulent time for you and your teen. However, watching your teen blossom into a responsible adult can also be a source of great pride.

You may find that you have to shift from treating your teen as a child to knowing him as a young adult. In order to make this adjustment, you need to be able to effectively and positively communicate with your teenager. If you can maintain a personal, positive, and loving relationship with your teen, then the two of you can address most of problems together without damaging consequences. To accomplish this, you have to change the way you interact with your teen.

The key to a good relationship

The key to having a good relationship with your teen is open and honest communication. Teenagers may give the impression that they do not need their parents help as they get

older, but most really want it. A teenager who is trying establish his identity and autonomy will probably be offended by anything that seems like nagging or lecturing. So, how do you give your teen the guidance they need while letting them have their autonomy?

Be flexible when guiding your child through this phase of his life. Let him know that you care about him, and develop a bond with your teenager so he knows you understand him. When your teen feels connected to you, he will be less likely to shut you out. You may have to be willing to give your teen some space, but ultimately communicate your expectations. Let him know that you are there to offer help anytime your child needs it.

A parent as a confidant

Your teen should be able to confide in you. He should feel comfortable sharing his dilemmas, fears, and apprehensions. Know who his friends are, what he is going through at school, what he is reading, watching on TV and which websites he is visiting. Knowing these kinds of things can give you insight into his personality, and you may discover proactive ways to bring issues into the open.

If your teen confides in you that she's having trouble making friends or that she thinks she's too heavy, try to offer solutions to her problems rather than dismissing them as something that happens to everybody. Try to make positive comments about your teen, and find constructive ways to offer help.

Being someone your teen can relate to

Your teen should be able to relate to you. Today's, adolescents and their parents are very different from those of fifteen or twenty years ago, yet their primary needs to be respected, accepted, understood and trusted are the same.

Think about all the wonderful qualities your teenager possesses, and let them know how much you admire these qualities. Show them that you respect them and their opinions. Watch your teenager brighten up when you talk about what he loves doing. His interests essentially describe who he is, and when you take an active part in those interests you are becoming an active part in your teen's life.

The essence of all communication is the need to be understood. One of the best things that you can do as a parent, and a confidant, is be an active listener.

- Listen carefully and try to understand their points of view.
- Use your instinct to pick out their underlying fears and apprehensions.
- Communicate openly to connect on a deeper level with them.

Whether she is talking about a field trip to the museum or talking about a sports team, you can learn a great deal about your child by actively listening. When your child knows that you are listening and remembering what he says, he will want to talk to you even more.

Encourage responsible behavior through trust not lectures

Adolescents are eager to take on responsibilities, because they want to prove to their parents that they are trustworthy and mature. When you indicate to your teenager that you trust them, you can encourage responsibility in their actions.

It can be very tempting to criticize your teen when you get home from work and their sports gear, books, CDs, and clothes are strewn all over the place or when they are devoting more time to sports than they should be, but avoid that temptation. Let your child know that you care about his interests and appreciate that he works hard at school and in other activities, but that you also work hard and would appreciate him doing his part to clean the house. Approach the subject with him as you would with another adult. Don't get emotional or discipline him. Treating him like an adult will make him more receptive to helping.

To maintain a positive relationship with your teen as they make the transition into young adulthood, it is important to reevaluate your thinking and perceptions. Your teen is searching for his individuality, and as a parent you can support that search by being his friend and confidant as well as parent. You will find that your relationship with your teen, even during difficult times, will be one of the most heartwarming and enriching times for you as a parent.