

RAISING TWEENS AND TEENS: PART II

How to talk to your teen and tween about behavior and other Sensitive Topics

Last month we learned about many of the emotional, physical, and mental changes that occur during the teen and tween years. This month we will explore how to communicate with our teen, who may act like young children one minute, and then act like adults the next.

When beginning a difficult conversation, take time to think about the purpose:

- Do you want your child to change his or her behavior?
- Do you want your child to learn something new?
- Does this conversation need to happen soon?
(Remember that sometimes you need to “pick your battles.”)
- Should this conversation wait until your child is calmer?
(If people are upset, it is difficult to have conversations that successfully resolve issues.)

Tips on having a successful conversation with your teen or tween:

- View the conversation as an opportunity to teach your teen how to have a successful conversation when there is conflict.
- Do not try to “win.” The conversation is a step towards the change in behavior or learning something new.
- Avoid shaming or blaming because it puts the child on the defensive. As one child said, “I don’t know how to act my age. I have never been this age before.”
- Be careful not to talk at your child. Give your child a chance to speak as well. Let him or her offer suggestions on how to solve the conflict or for appropriate consequences for misbehavior.
- If your child is sighing or rolling his eyes, try to ignore it as long as he or she is still engaging in the conversation. If it becomes too disrespectful, postpone the conversation until he or she is ready to be respectful of you. Also, let the child know this behavior will not stop you from having this conversation at a later time.
- If you need to have a conversation about something that might be upsetting or embarrassing for the child, a good place to talk is in the car. Sometimes it is easier for them to open up when they are not looking you in the eye. (Please note: This is not recommended for children that may act violently.)
- Discuss your expectations and find out what the child might need in order to meet them.
- Lastly, do not expect your teen or tween to tell you that the conversation was helpful, or not to make fun of the conversation, or say its stupid. At this point your child may not want to tell you that he or she is learning from you. Look for results over time.

Always remember that despite all these developmental changes, you know your child best. Enjoy this very important time. You are still needed, even if they will never admit it!

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