

San Leandro Police Department

Six Tips to Get Your Teen Talking

Information in this article provided by Erin Munroe, licensed mental health counselor and author (www.erinmunroe.com).

Have you a teenager? Maybe you don't have one yourself but you have a niece or nephew who is at this wonderfully tumultuous time in his/her life. How do you get them talking? While one-word answers might be fine on some days, it is important to get to know what is going on with your teenager so you can keep him/her safe and guide him/her through tough situations.

Stop talking. You may be thinking, "Wait! But I have so much to tell her!" And while that may be true, and you may have a wealth of information for her, you need to know what she needs from you right now. If you tell her how to deal with test anxiety when she is struggling with how to approach her first big date — you will be wasting your breath and missing a great opportunity. So first things first, don't start talking until you have given her a chance to talk and then . . . let her talk.

Have patience. Want him to tell you everything you want to know as soon as he walks through the door? Think about that for a minute. How do you feel when your boss jumps on you as soon as you get in to work? Give him some time to relax, have a snack, and get settled.

Keep your judgments to yourself. While it is easy to listen to your teen vent and totally agree, that, "Yes, Jennifer is really mean, I never liked her either. I am so relieved you have finally seen the light and have stopped hanging out with her." Be careful — the enemy on Thursday may again become the BFF by Friday (and if that is the case, be prepared for

those comments to be thrown back at you during the next argument you have with your teen). Instead of judging her friends, you can definitely agree certain behaviors of her friends do not seem very nice. Steer clear of judging them in the heat of the moment and give suggestions on how she can handle certain situations.

Take a trip down memory lane. Remember what it was like to be a teenager? Appreciate how difficult it is for a teen to be left out of a party, broken up with, made fun of or fail her first class. Remember teens aren't equipped to cope with these situations — all of these experiences are brand new. This is all new, and he/she is building the experience we as adults already have behind us.

Forget about performance and focus on the journey. Think about the effort your teen has put into things even if the outcome isn't perfect. Put more emphasis on what steps he takes to get there; put less stress on the outcome.

Relax. Stop with the urgency. Although the years go by quickly, stop thinking about what is next and always planning for the next thing. Enjoy the day and be present with your teen. Sometimes we need to stop and appreciate the moment. Don't be afraid to be silly or laugh. Just having fun can be great for your relationship!

Try these tips. See if you connect more with your teen. It is amazing how a patient, non-judgmental approach can help your teen open up and see that you care about his/her day-to-day life, not just which college she is going to or how many points he scored at his basketball game.



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