

Conversation Tips

Communicating with teens can be challenging at times, yet effective adult/youth communication provides the support and guidance every adolescent needs. The following key tips will help you talk with your teen or pre-teen in a more meaningful way.

- **Don't lecture.** The focus should be on sharing ideas and discussion.
- **Encourage your teen to talk.** Do this by asking open-ended questions versus "yes" or "no" questions (e.g. "What do you think about ...", "Why do you believe that?"). Find areas of agreement. Praise them when they make a good point.
- **Listen.** Provide your undivided attention when your teen is speaking. Do not interrupt. Show that you care about what they have to say.
- **Don't criticize.** If you disagree with your teen, first ask them why they think as they do, listen closely and discuss the pros and cons. Often this process may cause them to change their position on their own. If you still disagree, explain why in a calm, nonjudgmental manner and correct misinformation respectfully.
- **Be honest.** Don't be afraid to tell your teen that you feel uncomfortable talking about a particular subject, that you aren't perfect and have made mistakes yourself, that you don't have all the answers but are willing to find them, etc.
- **Be clear and specific.** For instance, if you are talking to your teen about the importance of respectful behavior in a dating relationship, ask them in what ways a person could show respect on a date and then share your ideas.
- **If your teen tells you about a serious problem or concern they have, respond in a supportive way.** While the issue or problem they raise may make you angry, upset or fearful for them, the fact that they shared it is a sign they trust you to help them. Responding in a calm, supportive way sends the message that you are an approachable person they can come to in need.