

Communication Tips

Here's a summary of tips to improve communication with your adolescent.

1. Begin statements with "I" rather than "you." Starting with "you" triggers defensiveness. Instead of saying, "you're really rude," say, "I'm angry that you walked out of the room while I was talking with you."
2. Avoid generalization. As soon as an adolescent hears one, her mind starts to search for the exception to refute you. Instead of saying, "you never clear the table," say, "You forgot to clear the table this evening."
3. To eliminate confusion, be as specific as possible when asking for something. Instead of saying, "Don't forget to take out the garbage," say, "Please take out the garbage before you go to school."
4. Ask a question that requires more than one word to answer. That will increase the chances of a longer conversation. Say, "Tell me about your day at school," instead of "Did you have a good day at school?"
5. Stick to one topic at a time. Avoid this kind of sentence: "I want to talk with you about your report card, and by the way, I don't like the way you treated your brother last night." Instead say, "I would like to talk to you about your report card. When would be a good time to do that?"
6. When there is tension between you and your teenager, avoid attacking. Remember these three steps.
 - Name your feeling.
 - State the reason for your feeling.
 - State what you would like.

Here's an example. Don't say, "You're so inconsiderate. You knew I'd be worried when you weren't on time for dinner." Instead say, "I'm angry because you were late for dinner. I'd like

you to call to let me know you're going to be late so I don't worry."

7. Listening is more important than talking. Research shows that listening attentively communicates respect. That automatically sets a more positive tone and lowers defenses. When your teenager is talking with you,
- Establish eye contact but don't stare.
 - Don't interrupt.
 - Use short phrases like "Uh-huh" or "I see." They encourage your teen to keep talking.
 - Keep an open posture. Don't cross your arms.
 - Ask clarifying questions like, "I don't quite understand what you mean. Could you explain that again?"
 - Check to make sure you are understanding correctly. For example, you might say, "If I'm hearing you correctly, you're angry with me because you feel like I put you down last night."

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