

Improving the Parent-Teen Relationship

When teens are asked about their frustrations with parents, they most often tell about not being understood and not being listened to. While parents often state their teen does not listen and has an attitude. It is easier than you may believe to break this stalemate and improve the parent-teen relationship.

First of all, remember that children are mirrors of adults and teens are a mirror struggling between the adult and an image they want to be. However, the parent still carries the greatest influence over the teen. When the parent slows down their busy life style and listens more, the teen will have a better opportunity to also slow down and talk more. Parents create the atmosphere in the home, especially when the parent remains calm if there is a difference of opinion or negative emotion coming from the teen. Parents have the authority to calmly let teens know the discussion will not continue if they disrespect or yell and the parent should not become disrespectful or yell with the teen. Disrespect and yelling by the parent only shows the immaturity of the parent and gives the child permission to do the same. Parents need to give undivided attention with no television or other distractions that can get in the way of listening. Avoid making judgments and keep the door open on any subject. Even if the parent does not agree with the teen, show respect by listening, acknowledging feelings, and not belittling the teen's opinions. It is important that teens have a safe place to "test" their ideas by talking about them, a safe place to verbalize their points of view, and a safe place to freely express their feelings without criticism. If the teen does not receive adequate time, feel free to express them self, or feel accepted by the parent, they WILL find other people to talk and spend time with. When a parent tells me, "My teen won't spend any time at home," the parent needs to learn to create a place where their teen wants to be home. Start by asking the teen why they don't want to be home and calmly talk about the answers. Let the teen know how much you care and want to make the home a place where everyone can feel wanted and safe. It is the parent's responsibility to make the home a safe and welcoming place for the teen and seek professional counseling for them self to begin the process how to change the home atmosphere and the parent-teen relationship. After the parent understands their responsibility for the situation, it would be important to have the teen meet with the counselor to continue the healing process.

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