

## TALKING WITH TEENS

When talking with teens, keep the following in mind:

### IT'S ALL ABOUT THE APPROACH.

- Don't blast teens with "20 questions" when they first walk in the door. Catch them when they are genuinely ready to talk. However, you may have to create that moment by going out for ice cream, taking a bike ride or working on a project together.
- If you're upset with your teen, you can't solve a problem effectively. Give yourself some time to cool down before addressing the issue.
- Keep the situation in perspective. It's normal for teens to push the boundaries. Let them experience how to question what they see, and to develop skills in reasoning with you. That way, they will learn to think for themselves to deal with peer pressure and other teen issues.

### ARE YOU READY TO TALK?

- Avoid telling teens "this is how it's going to be." Be respectful by asking for their perspective of the situation – and really listen to them. Try to find a solution together.
- Pose your questions as open-ended questions instead of yes-no questions.
- Don't accept "I don't know" as a response. Instead try, "Tell me how you see it."
- Tell a joke or humorous story to relieve a tense situation, but don't make fun of teens. Their self-esteem can be fragile.

- Don't solve problems for them. Our teens will not be living with us forever. To let them grow, we should look for opportunities for them to make their own decisions.
- Get right to the point and be clear about your concerns. Explain why you feel the way you do, and then describe what you want or need in the future. Be ready to listen to what your teen needs, too.
- If you already know the answer, don't ask the question. For example, if you clearly disapprove of your teen's outfit, don't ask, "What are you wearing?!" Instead, you might try, "I'm concerned about that outfit. It's revealing and I don't want others to get the wrong idea about you. Please choose something else."
- Teens know they can wear down most adults with sheer repetition and persistence. When a discussion has reached the "wheel spinning" point, end it. To continue is to ask for trouble, as frustration may cause things to be said that we'll regret.
- Listen up. If teens see us as adults that will not listen to them, they will stop talking to us. Force yourself to listen. If necessary, count to 100 before responding and avoid giving unwanted advice or lecturing.
- Tell them often how much you love them.

*Source: "Positive Parenting of Teens" University of Minnesota Extension Service & University of Wisconsin – Extension, 1999.*

