

A decorative border of black and white line art surrounds the central text. It features stylized flowers, leaves, and swirling vines. The central text is enclosed in a simple black rectangular frame.

Mothering Matters

Parenting in Switzerland

THE ART OF
COMMUNICATING

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COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR PARENTS
WITH TEENS
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When it comes to teenagers, gone are the days where children accept everything parents say. As children turn into teens, they have the opportunity to interact with others who have different opinions, ideas, and knowledge from that of their own parents. Add to this the influence of TV, radio, and Internet and you really have a challenge on your hands. So how do you as a parent communicate your ideas, opinions, and, above all, values and expectations, without getting into what feels like World War III?

First and foremost, before you try to figure out the art of communicating with teens, you as a parent have to understand a little about the crucial developmental stage in which teens find themselves. "What stage is this?" you might ask. It is one of self-discovery and understanding, one in which they are bound to ask questions, and as a matter of fact, should ask questions, about the world and their place in it. This is not an easy time for teens, for the reality of certain aspects of the world starts to sink in, including that of less than perfect parents, siblings, teachers and people in general.

Teens are mostly worried that they are going to be treated like children forever, and also worry that they aren't ready yet to be an adult. They worry about fitting in, school grades, finding a job, sex, drugs and alcohol. They

worry about their families, their friends, but mostly they worry about themselves. The hard part about communicating with a teen is that they won't always tell you what they are worried about because they themselves can't always figure it out. Also, many teens don't necessarily want to share their problems. Why? Because this would reinforce their fear of being unable to handle a situation, and thus be treated continually like children. However, not all is grim and hopeless. All parents need to do is be understanding of this process, and then be willing to honestly and openly communicate with their teens.

We have often heard the phrase "communication is a two-way street," however, we also often forget the true meaning of it. The reason teenagers often cite for not talking with their parents, is that the parents just don't listen. Parents, on the other hand, think and feel that it is their teens who just won't talk to them. So, who exactly is right then? The truth is that probably both parties are right, to some extent.

Tip 1

Remember that this stage doesn't last forever, so do try hard to be patient and diplomatic.

Tip 2

Don't expect your teen to tell you everything. Remember, they need to feel that they can manage things without parents, so as to point



out to everybody, especially themselves, how grown-up they are. Respect this by not listening in on conversations, by not snooping, by not reading diaries, and above all, by not being pushy or demanding that they always tell you everything. However, do explain regularly that there are some things you need to know in order to ensure their safety, like where, who, when and what they're doing (including online).

Tip 3

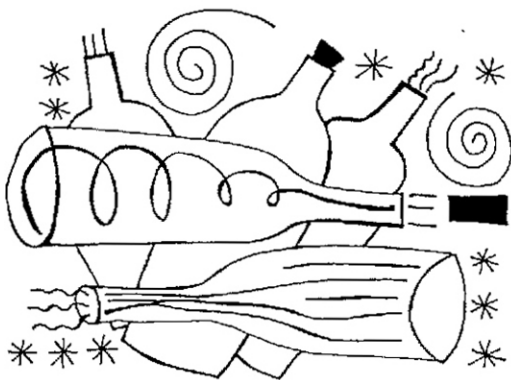
Be fair! This is key when dealing with your teens. Yes, we know how hurtful teens can be at times, but don't lose your temper and bring up the past, or say/do anything to embarrass them. This would be vindictive on your part, not to mention a poor example for behavior!!!

If either one of you gets too heated to discuss the problem, take time out and discuss it when you are both calm. After the storm has passed, you can tell them about how hurtful they were, and that you would expect a more respectful approach in the future. Contrary to popular belief, teens do care about your feelings! At times, though, you will need to guide them toward treating others, including you as the parent, with respect.

Tip 4

Do be positive, encouraging, and supportive. If your teen has a fight with a friend, this is not the time to say something negative about that friend because this is guaranteed to further upset them. Instead ask them to share their feelings with you, and take advantage of the opportunity to talk about certain aspects of the issue; in this case, the highs and lows of friendship. Remember to validate

feelings, and provide encouragement by saying something positive. Caution to parents: do not always expect the two of you to get into deep conversations. It might just be that your teen needs their feelings validated, so let them vent!!



Tip 5

Although being in listening mode is not possible twenty-four hours a day, parents still need to show that they are open to listening when teens need them. This need might arise when parents are on the phone, cooking dinner, or doing something else. Get off the phone, turn off dinner and give your teen your undivided attention.

Tip 6

Practice being quiet at times. If all your teen wants to do is to vent, then let them do just that, and do not interrupt! Once they are finished, ask if they want to discuss anything further. If the answer is no, then respect that, and make sure to reinforce the message that you are there for them.

Tip 7

Do not lecture, because they will stop listening. Although teens should be made aware of how you feel and what you expect, keep it short, calm, and to the point. Be sure to repeat your messages regularly so that they do sink in. Think one time should be enough to get a message across? Think again. It takes adults several repeats before we remember something, so why do we expect our teens to be different!?

Tip 8

Do not always expect yourself to have the answers to everything, and do not be afraid to admit this to your teens. They will respect your honesty more, so try not to shoot 'from the hip.' However, do follow up your honesty by looking into the answers ASAP and get back to your teen. Do not procrastinate with your answers, for this will suggest that you do not care about their worries, and will potentially alienate your teen.

Remember that you are not alone in this battle, so make sure you ask your friends and other parents how they deal, or have dealt, with certain situations. Do not be afraid to ask questions, for the answers might provide you with some very good and valuable ideas. Also, for more information, consult parenting books, or websites specializing in parenting, including those that are set up by public health departments. †

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