

Tip Sheet

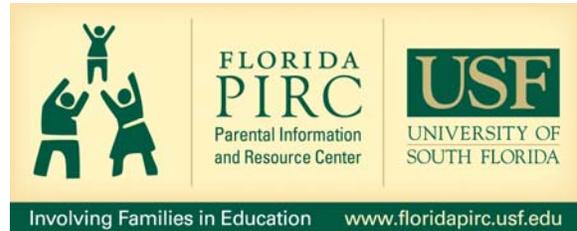
COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEEN

Teen Speak

It's the rolling of the eyes, shrugging of shoulders, and responses such as "I don't know...," "I didn't do it...," or "WHAT??!!" If you're the parent of a young teen you've probably been on the receiving end of these responses. Parents often become frustrated when they try to communicate with their teens and get little or no feedback. In fact, it makes you ask the question: Why try to talk with them at all?

Observation!

Just observe your teen when she/he is on the phone to a friend and you'll notice plenty of communication going on. Teens do love to talk, but it has to be on their terms!



Active Listening

If conflicts arise between you and your teen, try using active listening. Active listening is an effective tool to use for really listening to each other, and is especially helpful for resolving conflicts. With active listening, we pay attention to the other person's thoughts and feelings and try to understand them. Sometimes we start thinking about what we are going to say next and then we don't even know what the other person is saying. But with active listening, we must listen carefully to each other. Here are the steps to active listening.

- Only one person talks at a time. The other person listens.
- Pay attention to the speaker. Look at the person. Nod your head and focus on what the person is saying.
- Tell the speaker what you heard. Summarize what was said and the speaker must approve your summary.
- Now it's your turn to speak. Your partner listens carefully to you and must summarize what you said before speaking again.

Practice active listening. It really works!

Worse Than Grounding

Teens hate to be lectured to. In fact, one parenting expert suggests that lectures are worse than grounding. Remember how you could block out a lecture from your own parents when you were a teen? Lectures are sheer torture and do little good. When your teen wants to talk, it is best to listen and not criticize.



Don't Play Judge

Listen to your teen with a neutral ear. Do not judge your teen's attitudes, remarks, opinions, clothes, or friends. Judgmental remarks will close down a conversation before it even begins. Teens need accurate information about issues they face such as surfing the Internet, smoking, using illegal drugs, experimenting with sex, and abusing alcohol. Think creatively about how to bring up these topics with your teen.

Rules To Live By

Both you and your teen should work together to set rules that are fair. Be very consistent in enforcing the agreed upon rules. Set limits. Check with other parents whose teens are your child's friends to determine curfews and other rules.



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Nose For News

To begin a discussion on a controversial topic, you might use a news article about a teen harmed by making a poor choice. Talk about how the teen's parents must feel and relate it to your love for your teen. If you ask some questions, try not to ask any that accuse your teen or put him/her on the defensive.

Chatting

Find some time each day to talk with your teen, even if it's only for a few minutes. Rather than asking, "How was school today?" be specific and say, "Did you remember all the facts for the history test?"



Family Time

Certainly teens want to "go hang" with their friends all the time. It's a natural part of growing up, but you need to plan activities for the family to enjoy together such as movies, sporting events, plays, or camping trips. Hold family meetings and let everyone participate in decisions and working things out together. Work to keep those lines of communication open. **Shake hands! Hug!**