

Dr Kate Owen

Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Family Therapist

COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR PARENTS AND TEENS

Nonverbal Behaviour (How to Act)

- Use good eye contact (if culturally appropriate).
- Come down to their eye level – kneel down if you need to or both sit on a chair.
- Show that you are interested.
- Be mindful of your facial expression.
 - Try not to show an angry or upset face - the teenage brain is on high alert and can misread facial expressions.
 - Have "smiling eyes".
- Consider the tone and volume of your voice.
- Keep an open body posture - no arms crossed or pointing fingers.
- Stay calm - calm is contagious.
- Listen.
- Try not to “jump in” with suggestions to make them feel better or get your point of view across – sometimes it is better to just listen first.
- Give them a hug or hold their hand if they will let you.



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Verbal Behaviour (What to Say)

- Simple statements and questions - one thing at a time.
- Ask your teen how they are feeling - ask this when they look happy and sad.
- Name the feelings that you see to show them that you understand - this also helps them understand their own feelings.
 - E.g., "You look sad at the moment".
- Let them know how you are feeling and why.
 - E.g., "I am worried because you won't talk to me and I think that something is wrong" or "I am happy that we are spending time together".
- Avoid blaming, being critical, or dismissing feelings.
 - E.g., "It's your fault....." or "Don't be stupid".
- Ask open ended questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
 - E.g., Instead of saying "Are you sad?" you can say "How are you feeling?"
 - E.g., Instead of saying "Are you angry with me?" you could say "Tell me what is upsetting you".
- Encourage them to keep on talking to you - "Tell me more".
- Suggest things that might help difficult situations and ask them if they would like to do these things.
 - E.g., "We could go for a walk. Do you think that would help?".
- Ask them what they think will help in this difficult situation.
- When things are going ok get to know your child more.
 - E.g., ask them questions about what they like and don't like, what their goals are etc.



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Other Tips

- Don't force your child to look at you when you are talking – they might feel upset or ashamed.
 - E.g., avoid saying "Look at me when I am talking to you" if their poor eye contact is a shame response.
- Try to set aside 10-15 minutes during the day when you can spend time together to talk.
 - You could make this the same time every day and call it "Talk Time".
 - You can talk about what is worrying your child and what has been good about the day.
- Aim for quality over quantity - a deeply connected 5 minute talk is better than an hour of superficial and forced connection.
- Watch their nonverbal behaviour and respect when they are unable to communicate or connect in that moment - "Let's take a break and talk about this more in an hour".



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Other Resources and A Note From Kate

Hi There,

Parenting teenagers can be a tough job. The fact that you have read this handout is a sign that you are a proactive and committed parent. If you are interested in learning more about the teenage years, developmental changes that occur, and tips for navigating this life cycle stage, then please follow the links to more resources I have created for you.

Warm Wishes

Kate

- I have lots of [YouTube videos](#) that you might find interesting.
- If you like reading, then head to the [Blog section of my website](#).
- I send an email newsletter every month with my latest resources and extra links. Feel free to [subscribe and join my tribe](#).
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