

Believe it or not . . . YOU are the most powerful prevention against risk behaviors!

Having a real “Conversation” with Your Teen

Having a real conversation with your teen can be very challenging. A conversation is defined as sharing ideas. When you think about it, much of our family communication is about family logistics or about trying to get our children/teens to do what we would like them to do. We may feel like we’re talking to our children all the time, but “Do your homework!” doesn’t really count as a conversation. Here are a few tips for getting a conversation going.

- **LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN!** All of us need to practice listening in ways that help us better understand what our young people are saying. Keep in mind – not all communication is verbal! Try to be aware of body language – your own and your teens too. Standing with your arms crossed sends a clear non-verbal message that you’re not ready to listen with an open mind.
- If your teenager seems to be hanging around, she/he might have something to talk about. Ask!
- If s/he doesn’t respond, follow-up in a few days.
- Follow-up with conversations by asking:
 - “Remember when you told me about ____? How’s that going now?”
 - “I was wondering what you did about_____?”
- Be aware of *how* you are listening. Are you really trying to understand what your teen is saying or are you thinking about what you are going to say next? Listen to understand, not to advocate *your* position.
- Try to repeat back to your teen what you hear him/her saying and check to make sure that what you are hearing and what they’re saying are the same.
- Name your own feelings. Help your teen get beyond “fine, mad, sad, happy... and eye-rolling.”