

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

### Communicating through the Teen Years

Adolescence is all about “becoming” your own person and this is something to celebrate! All of us want our teens to become independent, have their own values, be lifelong learners and good friends. But “becoming” this independent person inevitably means separating from those closest to you and questioning everything that parents hold dear.

This can be painful and scary for you *and* your child. And let’s face it – it isn’t easy to be caring and supportive when you are met with what seems like constant criticism and argument. Just like when your child was two, it really is all about developmental stages. Understanding what’s going on can help parents not to take this behavior quite so personally. Here are some development facts that might help:

- **Teens are still learning to read other people’s emotions – including yours.** They see anger where none exists and miss it when it’s right in front of them. Talk about how you feel – name your feelings. Don’t assume your teen will know you’re hurt or proud by looking at your face.
- **Teens are “moody” because their brains are still developing** – the amygdala in over-drive and the prefrontal cortex not fully wired. The most helpful thing parents can do is LISTEN and observe with an empathetic, reasoned, non-judgmental attitude. Even when confronted by a slammed door, try to remember, we are the grownups with the fully developed brains and we cannot afford to let our emotions take over.

No matter what, try to be sure that your consistent message is: *I love you, I care about you and I believe in you, and I’m always there for you.*

**Mutual respect is the foundation of good communication.**