

February 2005

Ideas for Parents

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEENAGER

Trying to talk with your teenager can sometimes feel like trying to get a rock to jump rope. The rock doesn't listen to what you say, won't follow directions and won't get off the ground. The frustration grows as what you are saying gets ignored. Poor communication will cause misunderstandings to mount. The misunderstandings can cause friction between the teen and parents. If you've experienced any of this, here are a few tips to help overcome the communication difficulties.

Actions speak louder than words. Most communication is done non-verbally, as much as 80%. Your body language, hand gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice all need to send the same message as the words you speak. When the same message isn't sent, your teen may be confused, misunderstand what you say or underestimate the seriousness of what you are saying.

Talk face to face. Eye contact is important! Look at your child when you are having a conversation with him/her. The eye contact you make lets him/her know that you care and are listening. Your attention is focused on what he/she is saying, and you won't be easily distracted.

Ask Questions. It's important to know what is going on. Ask questions, especially if your teen is not volunteering information.

Consider what your teen says. Listening to your teen can be hard to do at times. If you really listen to him/her and consider what he/she is saying it will make your child feel that you value what he/she says. Your teen's ideas and opinions are important, and it may help you to understand how your child feels or what he/she is thinking. If your teen says something that is hard for you to hear, try not to overreact. It is a natural reaction as a parent but it can break down the communication because your teen may feel that he/she cannot talk to you or that you do not understand.

Show Respect. Actively listen to your teen. Your actions will be reflected back to you from your child. If you model respect, he/she will be more likely to show the respectful behavior.

Use "I" Statements. Express to your child how you are feeling. Using "I" statements expresses your feelings without your child feeling attacked. I am/feel (emotion) because (reason). The use of "I" messages avoids expressing blame and accusations. It helps to focus on the behavior and not your child.