

Communicating with a Troubled Teen

Silent dinners. Slammed doors. Sullen looks.

Odds are, you have a teenager.

Moodiness and rebellion are to be expected during the teenage years. A combination of hormonal changes and increased freedom causes many adolescents and teens to push the boundaries of acceptable behavior. If communicating with your teen has become a challenge, try these tips:

- ▶ **Stay calm.** Sullen teen behavior can be maddening and stressful, but getting angry will only escalate the situation.
- ▶ **Keep the conversation going.** Teens may struggle to articulate their feelings or talk about situations they find challenging or difficult. It may take multiple conversations to get a clear picture of your teen's current concerns. Focus on fostering a safe environment for ongoing communication.
- ▶ **Take multiple approaches.** If you are co-parenting a child, find specific ways that each of you can keep the lines of communication open. For instance, one parent may have their best opportunity to talk with a child during a favorite sports activity, while another may have time to chat during the morning commute.

- ▶ **Accept that your teen may sometimes be mad at you.** Your teen may become angry with one or both parents for reasons that seem capricious or unfair. A divorce or separation may be particularly complicated, so be prepared for times that you may be viewed as the "bad" parent. Be patient and give your teen time to work through feelings of resentment or disappointment.

Sometimes, your teen's behavior may move beyond normal teenage acting out to something that could risk your child's wellbeing or future opportunities. Behaviors that should be addressed immediately include:

- ▶ Breaking curfew
- ▶ A drop in grades or disciplinary issues at school
- ▶ Fighting, bullying, or mean behavior
- ▶ Alcohol or drug use
- ▶ Sexual activity at too early an age and/or unprotected or unsafe sex

LifeMatters can provide tips for communicating with a reluctant teen. Call 24/7/365.



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