

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEEN

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS
AND CAREGIVERS

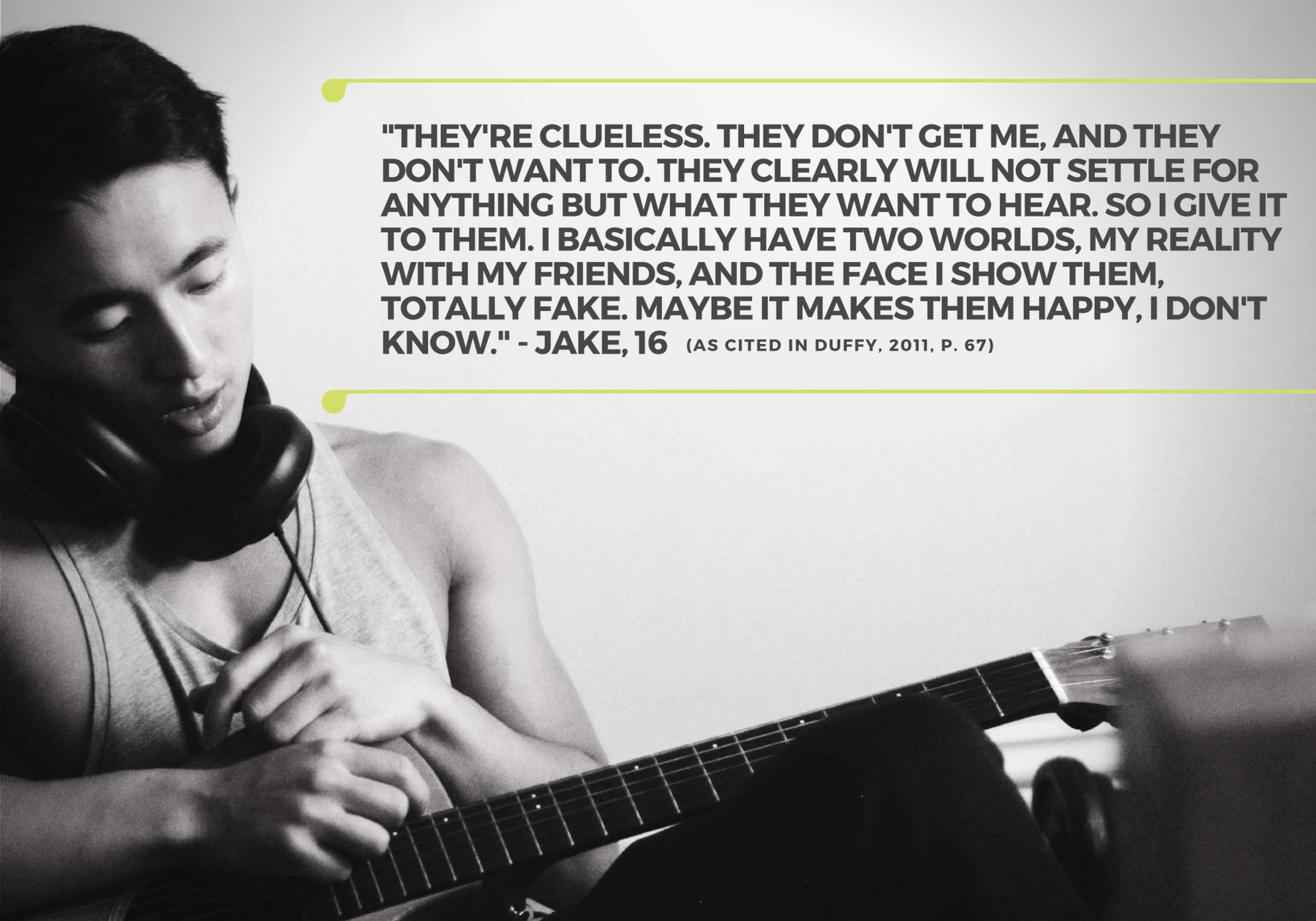
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INTRODUCTION

Do you ever feel like attempting to communicate with your teenager is similar to the game Telephone? You know, the one where you have a group of people sit in a circle and one person comes up with a message to relay to the entire group--a message that is whispered to one person at a time until it gets to the last person. The message will often begin with something like “I love to eat toast for breakfast” and end with a completely distorted message like “My cat loves to nap.” And when the final message is said aloud to the entire group, laughter erupts and you all wonder “how did we get to that?!”

Unfortunately, **miscommunication in the home usually leads to anger and frustration** rather than belly-laughs. Effective communication is crucial for the healthy functioning of a family. This guidebook will briefly walk you through some of the barriers to effective communication with your teen and how to avoid them. Additionally, you will learn the impact of communication with your teen on matters of faith. The communication skills outlined in this guide are not only useful in the context of your home, but also in your relationships outside of your family.



"THEY'RE CLUELESS. THEY DON'T GET ME, AND THEY DON'T WANT TO. THEY CLEARLY WILL NOT SETTLE FOR ANYTHING BUT WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR. SO I GIVE IT TO THEM. I BASICALLY HAVE TWO WORLDS, MY REALITY WITH MY FRIENDS, AND THE FACE I SHOW THEM, TOTALLY FAKE. MAYBE IT MAKES THEM HAPPY, I DON'T KNOW." - JAKE, 16 (AS CITED IN DUFFY, 2011, P. 67)

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

IN A GIST

*Your teen desires to be heard and understood.
Effective communication can help that happen.*

Effective communication is an important foundation for the development of healthy and intimate family relationships. If you are able to effectively communicate with your teenager, there is a greater chance that he/she will feel understood and heard. **When your teenager feels understood and heard, trust, respect and intimacy can be more easily established.**

Not only that, but research indicates that an individual's emotional development is dependent on bonding emotionally with their parents during childhood and adolescence (Chapman, 2010).

In order to learn how to effectively communicate with your teen, it is important for you to understand some of the most common barriers to communication. The following page will walk you through five things that often lead to communication breakdowns in the family.



5 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

1. Poor listening skills

If your teen feels as though their voice is not being heard, effective communication will be nearly impossible.

2. Emotions

Emotions can really put a damper on effective communication. When the emotions of both you and your child get thrown into the mix, the chances of miscommunication greatly increase.

3. Environment

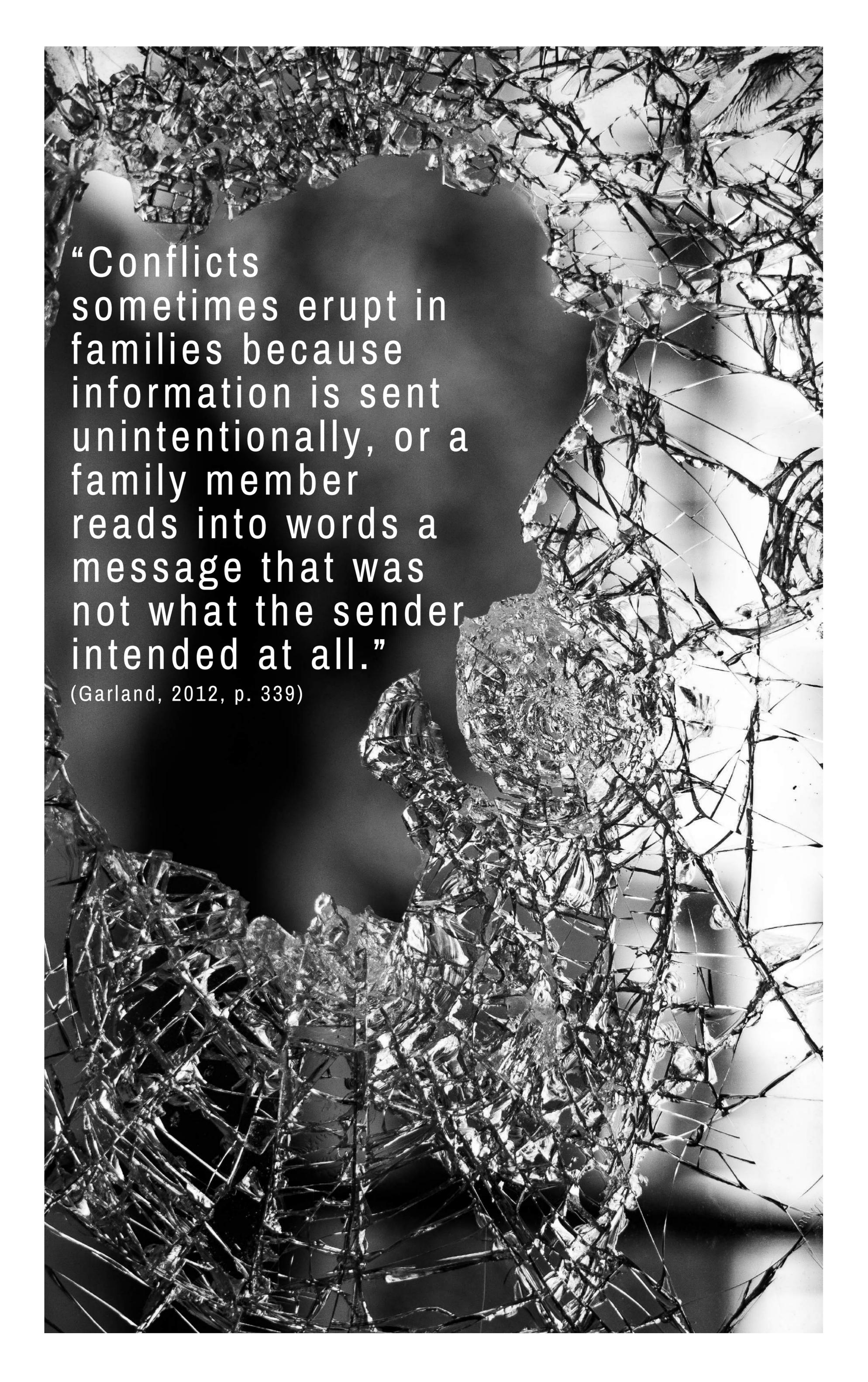
Outside factors such as noise can lead to distracted communication, which often ends with miscommunication.

4. Timing

When communicating with your teen, you must understand the importance of timing. For example, talking to them about their missed curfew when their friends are over may not be the most effective timing.

5. Egocentrism

This big word can be boiled down to this: *It's all about me and my understanding of the world.* Talking to your teen with this viewpoint can be detrimental.



“Conflicts
sometimes erupt in
families because
information is sent
unintentionally, or a
family member
reads into words a
message that was
not what the sender
intended at all.”

(Garland, 2012, p. 339)



6 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

IN A GIST

Effective communication doesn't develop overnight. It is a skill that must be practiced over and over again.

Now that you know some of the most common barriers to effective communication, we can take a look at some of the communication skills you can practice when engaging with your teen.

The following six keys to effective communication are just a handful of ways that you can improve communication within your family.

Be forewarned -- there will be days that you mess up. And that's okay. The most important thing to remember is that no family is perfect, but by the grace of God, we can strive to be more Christ-like in our words, thoughts and actions each day.

1 BE AVAILABLE.

A study mentioned in Gary Chapman's Book *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers* found the following: 71 percent of teens ate at least one meal with their family each day, but more than half of teens engaged in an activity like watching television, reading or listening to music during mealtime. Mealtime is a prime opportunity for you to intentionally engage with your children. Additionally, you should strive to make yourself available to your child outside of mealtime. You may be thinking "I already spend so much time with my child!" But is it intentional, life-giving time? You can make yourself approachable and available to your teen by practicing the five communication skills listed below.

2 LISTEN, TRULY LISTEN.

Show your teens that you are listening to them by using both verbal and non-verbal communication. Make eye contact with them, nod when you understand something they are saying and ask questions for clarification when you don't understand. You can practice reflective listening by saying how you interpreted what they said. For example, you could say "Okay, tell me if I misunderstood. What you're saying is..."

3 AVOID EXTREMES.

Overgeneralizing and using extremes are a surefire way of causing high tensions between you and your teen. Try to avoid making statements like "you are always late for school!" Instead try saying "You've been late to school quite a bit recently. Would you like me to wake you up earlier tomorrow morning?"

VALIDATE EMOTIONS.

4 Teens are constantly criticized for being overdramatic, but it is important to recognize the emotions your teen is experiencing and validate them. Their emotions are real and they should be valued. Yes, perhaps they get blown out of proportion every once in awhile, but they are still real experiences for your teen. Avoid saying things like “quit being so dramatic!” or “life is not always fair--deal with it!” Let them know you recognize their emotions. One way you could do this is by saying “I can understand why you would feel frustrated when your math teacher changes a project at the last minute. Is there anything I can do to help?”

USE I-STATEMENTS.

5 When you say things like “You are so frustrating—why do you never clean up after yourself,” defenses are instantly drawn by your teen. That statement comes across as an attack on who your teen is as a person. Instead of drawing conclusions about who they are, communicate your feelings about their behavior. For example, you could say “I feel overwhelmed when I come home from work to a messy house.”

CLEARLY EXPRESS NEEDS.

6 Effective communication is a two-way street. It requires cooperation from both parties involved. When communicating with your teen, it is important to clearly express your needs. When you are open and honest with your teen about your needs in the relationship, it will invite them to do the same. An example of a parent/caregiver clearly expressing their needs would be if they said something to the effect of “When you are out late with friends and I don’t hear from you, I start feeling really worried. It would really help me if you called or texted me once to check in if you’re out past 10pm.”

"AUTHENTIC FAITH INSPIRES AUTHENTIC FAITH"

- SARA BALDWIN



TALKING ABOUT FAITH

IN A GIST

You have the opportunity to help develop your teen's faith. Find ways to bring faith matters into every day life.

Studies show that you, as a parent or caregiver, are the most influential person in your child's faith journey. Now, don't let that scare or overwhelm you. This does not mean you have to "have it all together." It simply means that you must be willing to live out an authentic faith in front of your teen.

I was speaking with my friend the other day, and we began to talk about how parents can help create an environment where their child's faith can be developed. My friend let out a laugh as she recalled all of the car rides after church when her mother would ask her what she thought of the sermon. She said that those conversations in the car truly helped develop her faith.

Maybe talking to your teens about matters of faith seems scary; perhaps you feel inadequate, but know that you have an opportunity to help develop their faith. You do not need to have deep, mind boggling philosophical conversations, simply find ways to discuss matters of faith throughout your every day lives.



SEEKING HELP

If you try some of these strategies for effective communication with your teen, but still find yourself struggling, please don't hesitate to seek help.

Ask to meet with your pastor to discuss what options you may have. Parenting is not an easy job, but you are not alone.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

- Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (NIV)

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