



EFFECTIVE MONITORING:

Keeping Your Child Talking to You

As our children enter adolescence, they need to develop a sense of themselves that is separate from us. This makes them develop a greater need for privacy. Some become angry as we check in on their lives and others become silent. Even though it may sometimes seem that they are trying to push us away, it is important that we work to keep open communication.

We must honor our children's need for increasing independence, but we also need to continue to monitor them to assure their safety. This means knowing who they are spending time with, where they are going, what they are doing and when they will return. The truth is that we only can really know the answers to these questions when they choose to honestly tell us what they are doing.

The following communication strategies are key to keeping your child talking.



● BECOME AN EFFECTIVE LISTENER

> Spend more time listening than talking.

- Adolescents sometimes shut down when we give answers, especially if they disagree with them. But they appreciate our listening and subtle guidance if it helps them to figure things out on their own. When you show them that you trust them, they learn to trust themselves.
- Keep the conversation going with phrases that show you're listening like "Hmmm", "Oh", and "Tell me more."

> Do not react with judgment when your child shares information with you, even if it is upsetting.

Take a few deep breaths and gather yourself before your respond.

- Your child may say, "Mom, I have something to tell you but I'm worried you'll be upset."
 - > Try to respond in a way that invites her to open up to you, "You know you can tell me anything. I love you no matter what and am always here to help."
- If your child responds, "Here goes. I met this girl and really like her. I think I want to ask her out."
 - > **Don't say:** "You're not ready to date, you are too young." He'll stop talking.
 - > **Instead say:** "Thanks for coming to me about this." This opens up the chance to talk about relationships, sexuality and safety. These open conversations may even allow him to decide on his own that he's not ready.
- If your child tells you, "My friend Bianca is doing drugs."
 - > **Don't say:** "I told you that Bianca was trouble. Her own parents don't even pay attention to what she is doing. You can't spend time with her anymore."
 - > **Instead say:** "Thanks for coming to me about this. Why do you think she is using drugs?" This opens up the chance to talk about the dangers of drugs and the fact that people sometimes use them to manage their problems. The conversation itself will model that talking about a problem does more to solve it than avoiding it by getting high. It may even give you an opportunity to begin to talk about healthy coping strategies.

- > **Do not offer immediate solutions to your child's problems.**
 - Avoid the temptation to solve your child's problems.
 - > **Don't say**, "You need to tell your math teacher that you will miss class for your basketball game and you should ask a friend to take notes for you".
 - > **Instead say**, "Thanks for telling me that you will miss class because of your basketball game. What do you need to do to handle that?"
- > **Do support your child in coming to her own solutions. Be a sounding board to bounce ideas off of.**
 - You might say things like, "You're good at coming up with solutions. What ideas do you have to work through this?"

● BALANCE CARING WITH STRUCTURE AND MONITORING

- > **Nurture your child's needs and show interest in her life inside and outside of school.**
- > **Let your child know how much you care about her and enjoy being her parent.**
- > **Provide ways for your child to participate in positive activities like sport teams, clubs or youth groups.**
- > **Don't be afraid of being a parent who is concerned about well-being and safety.** Do not try to be your child's friend. Children need someone who puts their safety above all else.
- > **Set appropriate limits to keep your child safe.**
 - Children need rules even when they pretend that they don't. Rules remind children that you care about them and will be their safety net until they can be safe on their own.



● BE OK WITH SOME ARGUING

- > **Arguments are a sign that your child is still interested in communicating with you.** Some arguing is healthy even if it feels awful. Arguing can even be productive and lead to increased agreement over time.

● BE FLEXIBLE WITH RULES

- > **When parents follow the "My house, my rules! You'll do as I say" style of parenting, teens often quietly rebel.** When they think a rule is unfair, they may do what they want and their parents will never know.
- > **Adolescents need to know their parents want them to grow and become independent,** but that rules exist to keep them safe.
- > **Young people need to know that they will earn privileges and freedoms when they demonstrate responsibility.** Conversely, they will lose those privileges when they show that they are unable to handle them.
- > **First, be clear what your rules are and make sure you communicate them clearly.** Then, be open to negotiate these rules once your child has shown increased responsibility.
- > **Let your child try to convince you why you should change a rule.** Be flexible when she has made a good case.
 - If your teen says, "It's not fair I can't go to the concert just because it's a school night. The band only plays on Thursdays."
 - > **You might say**, "I am worried about your homework and chores getting done and your being too tired for school on Friday. Have you thought about those things?"

- Your teen might respond, “I have it all figured out. I plan to do my homework during my free period on Wednesday and will do my chores after school before we leave. And I always wake up in time for school - I haven’t missed a day all year except when I was sick. Please Mom I really want to go.”
- > Here is your chance to show some flexibility, “It sounds like you put some thought into how you will take care of your homework and chores and you are right, you are good about getting to school on time. As long as you can show me your completed homework and I see that your chores are done, you can go.”
- > **Teach your child that all he has to do to get more freedom is to earn it through responsible behavior.**
 - “For now, the rule is no cell phones after 9:00 pm. If you can show me that you can be responsible then we can talk about getting more phone time next month.”
- > **Never give in on rules that have to do with your child’s safety.**
 - “I’m sorry but you can’t ride your bike to Toni’s house. You would have to cross the highway and that’s just not safe. This is not negotiable. Let’s figure out another way to get you over there.”

Good communication between teens and their parents is one of the most effective ways to improve their relationship and allows parents to monitor their teens’ activities without being intrusive. Parents who keep lines of communication open may find that their teens come to them frequently when they are having a problem.

SOURCES:

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MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION

909 Mountain Lion Circle | Harker Heights, Texas 76548 | 254.953.1923

www.MilitaryChild.org

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