**Parenting Teens Today by Mark Gregston**

[**Communicating with Teens**](http://www.heartlightministries.org/blogs/markgregston/2007/05/24/communicating-with-your-teen/)

Every parent of a teenager wants to build a strong line of communication with their teen. But sadly, the opposite is most often true. I’d like to share with you some simple tips to improve your communications with your teen.

You may wonder what the best timing is for building good lines of communication with your teen or pre-teen. **That’s simple.  Do it NOW, before problems, struggles and difficulties begin. And never stop working at it, even when there is conflict.**

As your children move from the elementary years into early adolescence, it’s essential that you adapt your style of communication to the changes taking place with your child. What was non-hormonal, now becomes laced with hormones. Total dependence moves closer to independence, and that affects how your teen interacts with you.  Unless you change with them, there will be conflict and broken communications.

There is a scripture that I believe accurately reflects the condition of most teens, and the “should-be” role of most parents. It’s when Jesus says, “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden (the condition of the teens part), and I will give you rest for your soul” (the parent’s part).

The hope is that we, as parents, become that place of rest for our kids a place where they might be restored.

Too many times parents become a place of added burden or hardship, or an extra “measure” of correction, when correcting, and a life of training, has already been done. Moms have the tendency to do the “Energizer bunny” communication that just keeps on going. And dads have that tendency to tune out when communication is most needed.

Moms, your over-correcting does not provide the rest your child needs. And dad, your refusal to speak up does not restore. What is crucial for your child is the balance of the mom and dad mix, which will result in that place of rest.

But to achieve this balance, it is important for us as parents to transition with our children, to change our style of communication. If we can successfully make this transition, then the day when our children begin to struggle or have difficulties and desperately need someone to talk to we are the ones they will turn to.

Now, let me give you some advice on how to build that bridge–how to make that transition…

1.  Start by laying down some new rules, not ones that dictate, but those that invite. In fact, these are rules for yourself, not as much for your child, including making it a priority to have one-on-one time with your child. For example, you might state that a new rule for your house is to go on a mother-daughter, or father-son special vacation each year. Another might be a Joke Night that gets everyone laughing, just laughing, no spiritual lesson attached, just pure fun time together.

2. Ask Thoughtful Questions…create a sense of wonder. Instead of always telling your child the answers, offer them thoughtful questions. And remember, not every question has to be answered immediately, or at all. They will learn to think on their own, and begin to ask you questions as you model one who asks questions. The questions themselves can lead to the right answers, without preaching.3

3. PAUSE…and wait to be invited. Hold off on the tendency to always drive the conversation and share your own opinions (Scripture says that a fool delights in airing his own opinion). Don’t break genuine interest, but poignant moments of silence (especially when they are not accustomed to silence from you) will move a child to ask, “What do you think?” Try not to force your opinion unless it is invited.

4. “I Was Wrong” diffuses difficult discussions. If you handled a situation poorly, admit where you are wrong.  You will take the fuse out of the firecracker when you do that. Once you admit you blew it, the issue can no longer be held against you.  Anger puts up barriers and must always be diffused before communications will open up.

5. Give Them Respect…consider others to be more important. Easy to say, and sometimes tough to do.  It’s basically putting your child first and showing them respect, even as you demand that of them. This should affect the way you speak to them (you wouldn’t yell at, belittle, or talk down to someone you respect), the way you discipline, the way you show grace and the way you respond when you are disappointed and upset.

I want to challenge you today to commit to building a relationship with your child, and that starts with good communications. Make time to communicate and really get to know your teen. And no matter how strained or difficult your relationship might be, there is always HOPE.  It may take time and persistence, but keep at it in a loving and natural way and they will eventually open up.

Remember, don’t give up — for God promises to turn your ashes to beauty, your sorrow into joy, and your mourning into dancing. The God that has put His thumbprint on the life of your child still holds him (and you) in His palm.

http://www.heartlightministries.org/blogs/markgregston/2007/05/24/communicating-with-your-teen/