

Tips for Talking to Your Teenager

The teen years pose some of the most difficult challenges for families. Teenagers, dealing with physical and emotional changes and facing an ever-complex world, may feel that no one, especially their parents, can understand their feelings. As a result, the teen may feel angry, alone and confused while facing complicated issues about their identity, peers, sexuality, drinking and drugs.

Parents may be frustrated and angry that their teen seems to no longer respond to parental authority while at the same time, they may feel frightened and helpless about the choices their teen is making. As a result, the teen years are ripe for producing conflict in the family. And, just when you feel less like doing it because of the conflict, talking is more important now than ever.

Let the conversations begin

Building a strong and open relationship with your teenager will make it easier to engage in conversation with them. This includes helping them to understand the dangers of drinking and driving, drugs and sex. While not easy to address, having conversations about these issues is critical to their health and well being.

Tips for tackling these difficult subjects:

- Do not go in with prepared speech. Your teen will instantly tune you out.
- Do not fire questions at your teenager to learn what they're up to. Instead, start with an opener such as, "You seemed to have a great time when you went out Friday night."
- If you are concerned about your teen, tell them. Be honest. They will listen to you with open ears if you speak from your heart and explain your concern.
- Let them know you believe in them and their ability to make the right decision when confronted with a risky choice.
- Talk with your teen about what they will do or how they will act in a given situation. For example, what will they do if an intoxicated friend insists on driving home?
- Tell your teen that it is OK to say no, and that they can always use you as a reason for not joining in on risky activities.
- Remind them that you will always come get them wherever they are. You may be saving their life if or when they do call you for help.
- Encourage your teens to be involved in school, sports, music or other healthy extracurricular activities. Kept active, they are less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors.
- Teach your teen your values by practicing what you preach and being a role model to them.

Soon enough, you'll recognize that teenage stranger again

There is no easy way to talk to your teen about hard subjects, but most teens will meet you halfway if they see you are making an effort. And the good news is that families are generally successful at helping their children get through the teen years and accomplish the developmental goals reducing dependence on parents, while becoming increasingly responsible, self-reliant and independent.

To find out more on parenting teenagers, call your toll-free number or log on to www.MagellanHealth.com/member.