

A DOZEN WAYS TO RELATE TO TEENAGERS

1. HONOR THEIR IDEAS AND FEELINGS

- a. Cultivate a willingness to see, experience, and understand the world from their perspective. Become, like the prayer of St. Francis says, an instrument of peace for them. Take the time to seek first to understand them, and then help them understand you. This is crucially important if you want to relate to your teenagers. This does not mean you do not have to agree with them. If you take the time to move from the mindset of your adult world into theirs, you will be able to validate their feelings and connect to them. This relational experience between you and them will become part of their internalized experience as adults, and teach them what it means and how it looks to stay connected to themselves.

2. HONOR AND RESPECT THEIR BOUNDARIES

- a. Teens need lots of private, quiet time to think, get clear about things, to talk to their friends, and more. Doing this requires that they have a safe, sacred space to unload the contents of the hearts and minds into their journals through poetry, or to express through their body via music, dance, artwork, and other mediums. It is important that they have a way of doing this without feeling invaded, especially by parents. If you want your teen to be able to set healthy boundaries, start by encouraging them and teaching them what it feels like and how to set them with you. This is their foundation.

3. DO NOT ENTER YOUR TEENAGER'S RELATIONSHIPS WITHOUT PERMISSION

- a. Your teenager does not need to know all of the intimate and personal details between you and your spouse, or about your friends, and they need the same kind of space within the confines of their relationships. Most importantly, never, ever criticize or negatively judge their friends. Do your best to suspend this, as it will result in internalized shame for your teen. In a sense, most teens feel extremely identified with their friends, almost as if they are them too. So if you judge their friends, without spending time with them, you are implicitly judging them, and sending them a message that you do not want to spend time understanding them.

4. RESPECT AND HONOR THEIR SPACE

- a. There are actually times where teens want to be with adults, and other mentors and elders in their life. Drop everything you can and go with this when it occurs. There are also times that they do not want to be seen within 10 miles of their parents, or other adults, which has to do with how they are developing a sense of independence, self-reliance, and autonomy. Do not take it personally. It is not a rejection of you, it is a learning process of independence for them. Choose your battles around this, and know that there does not necessarily need to be one.

5. GIVE THEM MORE CONTROL, POWER, A VOICE, AND 'SAY-SO'

- a. The research shows that the result of teens not getting enough say-so at home is decreased motivation, decreased performance in school, increases in anger, depression, and anxiety, and more acting out. LISTEN to their needs and offer as

much power to them as is reasonable. They will learn more through their experiences of success and mistakes, than they will from lectures.

6. AGREEMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY VS. RULES AND PUNISHMENT

- a. Take the time to create Win/Win agreements with them, and offer them an abundance of say-so about how their life looks, and operates. Be sure everyone is clear about the agreements and has bought into what you come up with together. This can actually be a creative and fun process, especially if you follow the above steps. Then be sure to follow through in a kind but firm way, no matter what. Holding them accountable to agreements is a great long term gift of growth and discovery for them and for you. Stay out of the business of you making the rules, and passing them down to your teens, and then using punishments for motivation. It rarely works with teens, and creates major unnecessary suffering and power struggles.

7. HAVE FUN, CULTIVATE JOYFULNESS & LIGHTNESS

- a. Listen to their music, go to their movies, when invited to spend time with them and their friends (which sometimes means driving them somewhere) do it. Their world is fascinating, fresh, innovative, and new. Their energy is fun, free, idealistic, and spontaneous. All of these are things most adults could use more of. Be willing to learn from your teenager in this regard. Do not miss out, they are only teens for a short while.

8. WALK YOUR TALK

- a. Nothing riles up a teen more than an adult with a double standard. If you do not want your 16-year-old drinking and driving, or texting and driving, than do not have a glass of wine before you go out for the evening, and stay away from your phone in the car. They are watching you like hawks, even if it does not seem like they are. Practice what you preach. Authentically avow what challenges you. Stay in integrity with what you ask of them, this is a great way of cultivating an honest and respectful relationship, without preaching.

9. RESPECT AND LOVE YOURSELF

- a. Teens learn best about how to take care of themselves by watching how we take care of ourselves. How well is your life balanced? How often do you cultivate time and space to reflect, or spend quality time with yourself? Are you putting your heart and your soul into work and other aspects of life you love and care about? Do you take care of your body through nourishing food and exercise? Do you nurture your friendships? Do you take time for spiritual growth and connection? Model this. It is powerful for your teen to see and will benefit you as well.

10. LOVE, ACKNOWLEDGE, APPRECIATE, AND RESPECT OTHERS, INCLUDING YOUR SPOUSE OR PARTNER

- a. As teens embark on the journey of special, close, intimate relationships, they will lean heavily upon what they have seen at home, and what has been modeled for them. Have you demonstrated or shown them how to peacefully resolve conflicts? What about a fun and affectionate relationship? Cooperation and mutual respect? Generously, and joyfully offering yourself in relationship, but also not losing

yourself in the relationship? Kind but firm boundaries? Have they seen a committed, loving, respectful relationship that grows over time? They need to experience all of this and more in order to put it into practice in their lives.

11. EMBODY WHAT YOU WANT TO CREATE

- a. If you want more respect from your teen, give them more respect. Whatever you are requesting of or demanding of or from them, first look and be sure YOU are giving it in abundance. That goes for love, time, respect, trust, or whatever the desired element is. It is your job to take responsibility for any lack of love or respect in your relationship with your teen and give it to them, unconditionally, and tenfold. That goes against some of our own paradigms, but you truly will reap what you sow with your teens. Embody and offer whatever it is you want to create.

12. LOVE AND ACCEPT THEM FOR EXACTLY WHO THEY ARE

- a. Honor their differences from you. See through their exteriors (hair, tattoos, clothes, etc.) and do not judge a book by its cover. Beneath all that 'stuff' is the same cuddly, warm, funny little kid you used to play with, and hold. There is still a lot of 'little kid' or inner child like qualities in teens (and in adults). Make it safe enough, and normal enough for those funny, playful, vulnerable parts of your teens to come out and play. Teens in our culture are judged so negatively today without most adults ever taking time to get to know them from a stance of a curious, open, accepting, and loving mindset. Smile at them, look them in the eye, look and listen for their unique essence or spirit. Let them know that you believe in them and their future despite 'bumps' in the road of their teen years. Those bumps are learning processes for them, and a normal rite of passage into adulthood. In 1982, a study of over 160,000 high school seniors were asked the question, "What do you want most in your life?" The overwhelming response was, "I just want to be loved." Love them unconditionally, and love yourself too.