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## **LEARN TO TALK TO TEENS AND LISTEN WITH YOUR HEART**

It's easy for parents to get discouraged when their children are teens. Many times it seems as though nothing you do or say is right. Communication may seem hopeless. Don't give into these feelings. Parents generally know their teenager better than anyone else. They have an intuitive sense of what their teen can handle.

Teen behavior is unpredictable. Parents may find themselves dealing with a child one minute and a responsible adult the next. A parent has the challenge of maintaining a balance of freedom with enough control to help their adolescent regulate their inner impulses. Be open about discussing your struggle to walk the tightrope between giving your teen freedom and yet maintaining some control.

**Give teenagers clear rules.** Adolescents often need help in controlling their behavior. They can be involved in setting these rules, which should be appropriate to their age. A common complaint of teens is that the rules are the same now as when they were much younger. This may be a legitimate complaint and one that should be discussed. Parents can show respect for their teenager's feelings and opinions by listening to them carefully. However, parents need to reserve the right to limit some actions. Often, teens will test parents and the rules. Don't be afraid to insist on behaviors that reflect important values. Communicate these values clearly to your children. Teens gain strength and self-respect from parents who are clear and consistent in their rules, who explain their decisions, and are willing to change rules if appropriate.

**Don't over-react.** It's typical for parents to look ahead to the teen years with concern. The result, however, might be over-reacting with severe punishment to even minor infractions of rules. Unfortunately, punishment usually has little positive effect on a teen's self-control and may result in more major problems if the teen rebels against his/her parents.

A better approach is to communicate your concerns to the teen. An open discussion of fears will help your teen to understand your position. It may also generate a greater willingness to work out and accept rules that everyone can live with.

**Accept adolescent behavior.** Adolescents can be moody, restless, critical of everyone, and self-centered. None of this is easy to tolerate. Remember that these behaviors indicate the inner turmoil that is a common part of adolescence. It is not a deliberate effort to be obnoxious. Some of these behaviors simply have to be accepted, even if they aren't approved. Most of these teen behaviors pass with time and a more likable person emerges.

**Give support.** Although teens make every effort to deny it, most still need parental help and encouragement. In fact, they may need it more at this time than ever before. Teenagers make mistakes and behave irresponsibly at times.

So, too, do most adults. The most useful response is one that avoids blame. Teens need to know that they are still loved, even when they have made mistakes. Encourage your teen to discuss what happened and what could have been done that would have had more positive results. Nurture independence and allow teens to make decisions and accept the responsibility for those decisions. At the same time parents still need to give support and provide guidance when mistakes are made.

Parents and teens will enjoy and appreciate each other more if they learn to talk to each other and listen with their hearts.