



How to Maintain Communication

Even though teens need to separate from their parents during adolescence, they also need to know that the safety net of home and family is always there for them. If the lines of communication are shut down, they are not yet capable of surviving emotionally; they need support and input. Let's take a look at a few guidelines for keeping the lines of communication open between parents and teenagers.

1. Pay attention to the small things along with the significant things. If you are generally a good listener, your teen will be more likely to talk to you.
2. When your teen talks to you, pay attention. Don't be doing something else.
3. If you can't pay attention right at the moment, explain why. Ask if you can talk about the issue later, at a specific time.
4. Ask questions for clarification, but watch out for coming across as critical. If your teen sees your questions as disapproval, stop asking them.
5. Expect your teen to change his mind frequently. Avoid commenting on the inconsistencies.
6. Express interest and encouragement in your teen's activities.
7. Accept your teen's opinions, even if you don't agree with them.

Preventing High-Risk Behavior

All parents fear their teens becoming involved in high-risk behaviors such as drinking, smoking, and sexual activity. There are some very specific things you can do to minimize your teen's need to act out. Here are some tips for preventing high-risk behavior:

1. Be a part of your teen's life. If possible, be present when she is likely to be home.
2. Encourage your teen to talk to you openly at any time.
3. When your teen tells you things, watch your reaction.

4. Avoid reactions that will cause him to think twice about being candid with you in the future.
5. Be specific about what kind of behavior you expect and what is unacceptable.
6. Keep harmful substances out of the house. This includes cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol. When teens have access to these items, they are more likely to use them.
7. Expect good things from your teen. Teens who know their parents expect the best have greater emotional well-being.
8. Encourage your teen to become involved in school activities. Those who are involved at school engage in fewer high-risk behaviors.

Preventing Teen Substance Abuse

Now let's talk about some of the risks that teens face. First, let's look at drugs and alcohol. These are a few things you can do to help your teen stay away from drugs and alcohol.

1. State your expectations clearly.
2. Pay attention to where your teen is.
3. When your teen leaves home, ask her to tell you where she is going. Ask for specifics.
4. If your teen says he is going one place but actually goes somewhere else, consider restricting his freedom for awhile.
5. Remember that your teen is innocent until proven guilty. Stay open to the possibility that there is a reasonable explanation for any story you might hear.

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Director of **The Marriage Clinic**

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- Build relationships with other parents and agree on the rules. If none of the kids in the group have complete freedom, there will be less peer pressure and more safety.

Teen Depression

Teens are known for their mood swings. It is common for them to feel sad or gloomy. Many parents become concerned about a teen's moods.

Depression is different from the blues because it lasts longer and is more intense. Clinical depression is an illness that can lead to very serious problems, with lifelong implications. Some of the warning signs that your teen may have something more serious than the blues are:

- ◆ She shows less interest in her appearance.
- ◆ She seems to feel hopeless.
- ◆ He seems to hate himself.
- ◆ He seems indifferent about most things.
- ◆ She seems numb.
- ◆ She lacks energy.
- ◆ He talks or thinks about death and dying.
- ◆ He changes his sleeping or eating habits.
- ◆ She loses interest in her friends or hobbies.
- ◆ She stops caring about her pets or cherished possessions.
- ◆ He has a sudden change in his grades at school.
- ◆ He complains of extraordinary stress.
- ◆ She withdraws from people.

If you think your teen's mood may be depression, here are some things you can do about it:

- Talk to your teen about how he is feeling. Help him get it off his chest. Encourage him to think of solutions to what is bothering him.
- Encourage your teen to participate in some kind of physical activity.
- Check in with her more often than usual.

- If these steps don't help and the problem seems serious, call a school counselor, teacher, or doctor. Ask for a referral to a qualified, licensed professional who specializes in working with adolescents who have emotional problems.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders affect more girls than boys during adolescence. They are emotional disorders that require the intervention of a health professional before they become life-threatening. If you think your teen suffers from either anorexia or bulimia, do not hesitate to seek the advice of your physician. Early treatment greatly enhances the chances of recovery.

These are the warning signs for **anorexia**:

- ◆ She has lost 25% of normal body weight without being on a diet.
- ◆ She has a distorted body image.
- ◆ She diets constantly even though she is thin.
- ◆ She fears gaining weight.
- ◆ Her menstrual periods have stopped (this is known as amenorrhea).
- ◆ She is preoccupied with food, calories, and eating.
- ◆ She exercises excessively.
- ◆ She binges and purges.

The warning signs for **bulimia** include the following:

- ◆ She eats uncontrollably (binges), often in secret.
- ◆ She purges by vomiting, abusing laxatives or diuretics, or vigorously exercising. She may also compensate for eating with strict dieting or fasting.
- ◆ She frequently visits the bathroom after eating a meal.
- ◆ She is preoccupied with her body weight.
- ◆ She experiences depression or mood swings.
- ◆ She has irregular periods.
- ◆ She has dental problems, swollen cheek glands, or is bloated.



Dr. Jonathan Isaacson is a licensed clinical psychologist, specializing in pre-marital and marriage counseling. He also specializes in helping singles choose healthy partners and loving relationships. With proven and timeless principles and strategies, you can create a loving marriage that will last a lifetime. Dr. Isaacson guides his clients to resolve couples distress and overcome challenges. He offers programs on marriage/relationship enhancement that includes a couple's personality and relationship profiles. Dr. Isaacson helps individuals overcome psychological and emotional problems which only become exacerbated in a relationship. He is the Director of **The Marriage Clinic** in Beachwood, Ohio and can be reached at **216-292-4500**.