

# families

## **Set a good example – your kids will do as you do.**

If you expect your teen to always wear a seat belt, you should be vigilant about buckling up. Don't drive home from a party after you've been drinking. Don't speed or disobey traffic rules and then expect your teen to be more law abiding than you. You can't enforce the rules unless you follow them yourself. Kids are sensitive to double standards. Make yourself a role model that your kids can look up to and learn from.

## **Talk with your kids early and often about tough topics.**

Make sure your kids know where you stand on important issues from their earliest days. Elementary school is not too early to start emphasizing traffic safety, the dangers of alcohol and drugs, and the importance of standing up for what you think is right. Keep discussion of difficult issues in your regular conversation with your kids. Don't wait for a crisis to talk about such issues as drinking, drug use, peer pressure and other risky situations that kids face every day. And remember that it is never too late to start talking! Use discussion of an event at school or in the newspaper to open a dialogue about the topic, and listen to your child's thoughts and feelings.

## **Teach your kids to listen by listening to what they have to say.**

Good communication is not about "winning" the argument. Nor is it about "giving up" or "giving in." Good communication is about listening to the other person, understanding his/her point of view and trying to reach a solution acceptable to both parties. By listening to your kids, you are setting the right example that will teach them to listen too.

## **Read between the lines. Your children may find it hard at times to say what's on their mind.**

Keep an eye out for non-verbal communication.



## **Guidelines for Good Family Communication**



Teens Today is a partnership between SADD, Inc. and Liberty Mutual

The SADD/Liberty Mutual "Teens Today" survey shows that good communication between parents and their teenagers can have a positive influence on risk-taking behavior by teens. How does a family assure that they have good communication? First, through genuine respect for another's position, and the development of conversational skills.

Here are some guidelines to promote good communication and some tips to help families successfully get through a conversation:

## **Praise your kids for doing the little things that can so easily be taken for granted.**

Be positive and build a strong foundation with your children by regularly acknowledging and praising them for their accomplishments. Let your kids know that you love them unconditionally so that they will be less likely to hide things from you. Let them know that you may get angry at certain behaviors, but you will always love them, no matter what they do. And when your child does tell you something unpleasant, try not to overreact. Parents and teens remember — disappointment and punishments are temporary; destructive decisions can have permanent consequences.

## **Make an extra effort to understand your teen's world.**

Give your teens your undivided attention when they want to talk to you. They need to know that you're there for them 100%. Meet their friends and include them in family or household activities whenever possible. Sit and listen to one of your child's favorite pieces of music with him/her and ask what your child likes about it. Tell your child about a particular piece of music from your teen years that had strong significance to you.

People often express their views without ever speaking a word. Perhaps your child might surprise you by doing a nice favor without being asked after an argument or misunderstanding. These unspoken gestures can be a means to reach out to you or acknowledge your point of view.

**Always remember the importance of reasoning.**

Show your teens that you respect and trust them. Ask for their opinion on important matters from time to time. By showing your teens your trust, you are creating a mutually respectful relationship. Don't just say no or disagree with your teens without thinking about the message you're sending to your children. Try to teach your teens to meet you half way. And always be prepared to give a valid reason for your answer to show your teens that you disapprove or disagree out of concern for them.

**Lighten up – take time out if you need to.**

Unkind words can be so hurtful, even if you didn't mean for it to come across that way. Bring humor to the discussion whenever you can. Try something fun, like role-playing with your kids, so that you both can understand each other's position instead of shouting at one another. For example, parents can assume the role of the teen calling from a party where drinking was taking place, and the teen can play the parents responding to the teen's call. Seeing each other's perspective is an important tool to help build communication. Teens may be surprised at how well their parents remember their own teenage years, and parents may be surprised to hear how they sound to their teen!

**Be prepared to let some things go, and take advantage of opportunities to make a positive point.**

Avoid the trap of policing every little thing – too

easily you and your teen will end up on opposing sides, arguing all the time. Sometimes you have to bite your tongue and let some smaller things go. Be cautious about nagging or your teen will soon tune you out. Place value on your own words and try to determine appropriate opportunities to get your point across when your teen is open to listening. If you have something important to say, look for a time when your teen is mellow and open, perhaps at the end of the day, or when you have shared a good time. Then choose your words thoughtfully, make your point, and then sit back and be prepared to listen.

**Respect your child – try to work together as partners.**

Encourage your teens to talk more about their feelings or expand on what they're saying. Don't treat your teens as if they are too young to know or understand. Teens today are forced to deal with many adult issues, so show them that you recognize these issues and provide them with the support and guidance they need to realize their goals. Be an ally to your teens, not another obstacle.

**Remind your child that you love them and care about their safety.**

Find ways to reassure your teens that you have their best interests at heart, even when you're not around. Think of new ways of communicating with them. Give them something to hold onto when you are away, or write them an email from work every day. Don't discredit your teens' need for you, despite what their actions may indicate. Reinforce your commitment by proving to them that you will always be there for them – through good and bad times. And don't ever give up – know that it is getting better with every day, as long as you are making the effort.

## Always remember these guidelines:

- **Praise your kids** for doing the little things that can so easily be taken for granted
- **Make an extra effort** to understand your teen's world
- **Set a good example** – your kids will do as you do
- **Talk with your kids** early and often about tough topics
- **Teach your kids to listen** by listening to what they have to say
- **Read between the lines** – your children may find it hard at times to say what's on their mind
- **Always remember** the importance of reasoning
- **Lighten up** – take time out if you need to
- **Be prepared to let some things go**, and take advantage of opportunities to make a positive point
- **Respect your child** – try to work together as partners
- **Remind your child** that you love them and care about their safety
- **Don't ever give up** – know that it is getting better with every passing day, as long as you continue to make the effort

