



How to Listen

Remember: the best way to find out what is going on with your child is to, well, find out what's going on with him. Lecturing won't get you there. A back-and-forth conversation could. Just talking to your child is only half the job. You can keep the lines of communication open by knowing how to listen and when to talk.

Here are some topics and hints to get your teen talking:

1. **Create a safe environment for your child** to share the truth. Assure your child that he can always be honest with you – without fear of ridicule or blame.
2. **Don't answer the phone or allow other interruptions** while you're talking to your teen.
3. **Listen to your child vent.** Sometimes she just needs to complain and get things off her chest.
4. **Rephrase your teen's comments to show him you've heard what he's saying** or give nonverbal support and encouragement by nodding and smiling.
5. **Be attentive for topics that lead into drugs or alcohol** (Example: perhaps your teen describes someone at school who is "always high" or mentions a celebrity who has gone to rehab). Ask your teen what he thinks about those people or their behavior.
6. **Focus completely on your child** and try to see things from your child's point of view. This will help you sympathize with his/her situation.
7. **Be aware that your child could be hiding his true feelings** out of fear, embarrassment, or something else, and you should be careful to not just take what the child says at face value.
8. **Listen between the words.** Pay attention to body language, facial expressions, difficulty finding the right words to use, etc.
9. **Recognize and confess when you don't have the energy to be a good listener** and agree to restart the conversation (as long as it isn't dire) at a later, better time.