



**CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION**  
*A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition*  
*Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol*



**November 19, 2008 – Door Openers for Communication**

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership Centre Region *Communities That Care*. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

If you've ever felt like talking to your teenager is like talking to a wall, you're not alone. Open communication is key to building strong families and helping young people make healthy decisions. Yet how can you do this if your teen won't even listen to you?

While it may seem counterintuitive, by talking less and listening more you may actually be able to improve communication between the two of you. Listening is one of the most important skills a parent can develop and will help you stay in touch with you teenager's experiences and feelings.

Parents who are interested in hearing what their kids have to say know the value of using "door openers" as opposed to "door slammers." Door openers are open-ended responses that tend to keep conversations going. They are not judgmental or condemning and encourage your child to openly share his or her ideas.

Door slammers are the opposite and are likely to close down any further meaningful communication. While it may not be your intention, the message they send is that you have little respect for your child and do not care to hear what they have to say. In order to build open and trusting communication, show your teen you are interested in hearing about his or her feelings and opinions even when you disagree.

Some examples of door openers include:

- "What do you think?"
- "Tell me more."
- "Let's talk about it."
- "That's a good question."
- "I'm interested in what you are saying."
- "That sounds important to you."
- "I'm here when you want to talk."
- "I hadn't thought of it that way."

Some examples of door slammers include:

- "No."
- "That's ridiculous."
- "Don't talk to me in that tone of voice!"
- "You don't know what you're talking about."
- "You are too young to understand."
- "I don't know what kind of people you hang out with but..."
- "I can't believe you just said that."
- "I don't care what all your friends are doing!"

Be warned that by using door openers you may be inviting your teen to share things you do not want to hear. Discussions about alcohol, sex, and other risky behaviors can be challenging. Resist the temptation to jump in with lectures and unasked for advice. By listening attentively, you encourage your teen to explore problems, evaluate options, and develop solutions.

This isn't to say that you will agree with everything your teen says or that you will not share your opinions. Your child needs to know where you stand on important issues and what your expectations are. However, a child who feels heard and understood is more likely to listen to and be influenced by what you have to say when guidance is offered.

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