



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



ARTICLE 4 – APRIL 7, 2008 – TALKING TO YOUR TEEN

Dawn Taylor is the Community Mobilizer for Care Partnership: Centre County *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.

When children are young, it seems like they never stop talking. But as teens seek greater independence, many talk less with their parents. And talking with teens about tough topics can become even more challenging.

“My daughter used to talk to me about everything,” says one mother. “Now she’s 14 and talks to her friends more than me. I know there are important things that we need to discuss but I feel like we’ve lost touch.”

While it’s normal for teens to want to spend more time with their friends, parents and teens need to stay connected. Teens face a bewildering array of messages about clothes, friends, and music as well as pressures surrounding alcohol, drugs, sex, and other risky behaviors.

When it comes to the tough topics, you are the best person to talk to your teen. Clear communication is essential to keeping teens safe. Your teen needs to know what your values and expectations are and the consequences for unacceptable behavior.

Try these tips, adapted [The Everything Parent’s Guide to Raising a Successful Child](#), for improving communication and promoting a healthy parent-child relationship:

- Do things one-on-one and as a family. Good times often bring about good conversations.
- Listen and identify feelings.
- Talk often with your teen using an affirmative tone and body language.
- Treat your teenager with respect.
- Greet your teen with “hi,” “I love you,” or “how was your day?”
- Communicate clearly. Be detailed about your expectations.
- Yelling doesn't work. ‘Time out’ of the conversation until you have better control.
- Avoid door slammers like, “I don't care what your friends are doing!”
- If you're giving instructions, write them down so teens will remember what’s expected.
- “Do as I say, not as I do” doesn't work. You are your teenager's model and they will emulate your behaviors.
- If you need time before you can talk to them about something that has upset you, tell them that you need time. Don't walk away silent and avoid shutting your teen out to show your disapproval.
- “Because I said so” actually works when you are being pulled into a power struggle in discipline situations, but explain your reasoning whenever possible. Teenagers respect and trust you when appropriate limits are set.

Today more than ever teens need to be able to talk with their families about the issues they are facing. Keeping the lines of communication open will help prevent substance use and other risky behaviors. To help families learn how to talk to teens about healthy relationships, a free informational session is being offered April 15, 7:00 to 8:30 PM at the Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology. Come and learn about current trends of teen sexual behavior, the associated risks, and ways to protect your youth by expressing your own values regarding sexual decision making. Ways to help youth to understand and prevent relationship dangers, such as acquaintance rape and dating violence will also be shared. For more information, contact Centre County *Communities That Care*®.

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