



Tips for Talking with Teens

It can sometimes seem very challenging to have meaningful conversations about important topics with teens. While no strategy is going to work all the time, the following tips can make it more likely that you are able to have a meaningful conversation with your teen.

Validate how your teen feels. Resist the urge to downplay their feelings or solve problems. It can be as simple as saying something like “That seems really difficult.” or, “It sounds like this was really upsetting for you.”

Don’t over connect. Validating your teen’s feelings does not necessarily mean agreeing with their feelings. If you get too caught up in their emotional response, your teen may not feel comfortable telling you if their feelings about something change. Say, for example your teen comes to you after an argument with a friend and tells you how awful they are. If you get caught up in discussing how awful this friend is with them, they may not feel comfortable talking about this friend if they make up.

Give praise. We sometimes forget that teens need praise too. Praise them for sharing with you, completing their chores, doing their homework, and for taking the time to talk with you. Thank them for what they do and let them know you notice how responsible, caring, or thoughtful they are being.

Listen. Give your teen your undivided attention. When you talk with them, make sure you do not have any distractions. Paraphrase what they say (that is, repeat back to them what they say with slightly different words) and check in with them to make sure you understand what they say. For example, if your teen is talking to you about how difficult their math class is, you could say, “It sounds like this class is really challenging and the way the teacher explains things makes it harder for you to understand, is that right?”

Control your emotions. Stay calm when you talk with your teen. Count in your head or take a few deep breaths before responding emotionally.

Don’t catastrophize. It can be easy to go through “what ifs” if your teen shares a problem they are having. For example, if they tell you they are worried about their friend’s alcohol use, you could jump to all sorts of conclusions about your teen’s own drinking and the influence this friend has on your teen. If you are able to calmly listen and offer help as necessary rather than jump to the worst-case scenario, your teens are far more likely to share with you when they are having a problem.

Express interest. Get to know more about what your teen cares about. Ask about their beliefs and opinions. Ask curious questions about things that interest them. Thank them for sharing.



Session One Activity

Throughout the next seven weeks, we will be asking you and your teen to have discussions and do activities together that relate to what you are working on during the HFBF sessions. Doing these between session activities is a great way for you both to try out the skills that you are learning in sessions as well as to improve your connection to each other. There also will be activities for you to do as a whole family.

For this first activity, we are asking you and your teen to have a discussion about what you think of the program so far and what you have learned. It is a great chance for you to share with each other what in the program so far has had an impact on you. It is also an opportunity to practice your communication skills!

Here are some questions to consider to get the conversation rolling:

What has been something in the program so far that surprised you?

What did you like most about the program so far?

What is one change you plan to make based on what you have learned so far?

What resource do you plan to look into, or have you already started investigating?

What did you learn in the first session that you would most like your teen/caregiver to know?

What topic do you most hope will be covered in future sessions?