



Tips for Being an Approachable Parent to Your Teen, by Cara Day

Tip 1: Ask empowering questions.

Whenever possible, ask an open-ended question instead of offering your opinion or idea. In general, parents do most of the talking when they are with their teens and then they wonder why their teens “won’t talk!” The key is to just listen—ask questions that come from a place of non-judgment that are worded in a way so your child want to share. Look at your child with open, expansive eyes, and a sense of calm (regardless of what you are feeling on the inside), as you ask questions such as:

How do you think that is going to work out?

What can you do about that?

How is that going for you?

What are your thoughts about it now?

What would your next step be?

How can I help you with this?

Tell me more.

For more like these, download *Winning Ways to Speak*, by Cara Day, at Daychild.org.

Tip 2: Put away your screens.

Attempt to make the time your teens are home screen-free. Tuck your phone into a kitchen drawer with the ringer off. Turn off the TV. Tuck your ipad and laptop away. Put them out-of-sight. Monitor your need to impulsively check in for work or social reasons.

There's 168 hours in a week. The reality is that you likely only get to spend 10 – 15 hours per week with your teen, if that. Save your screen time for when they are not around.

Tip 3: Touch them!

Senior citizens and teenagers have the highest suicide rates in part because they are the least-touched members in our society. Pull your teen in for a hug, offer a foot or shoulder rub, sit close when you talk, and hold hands while you drive or walk. Even if your teen seems embarrassed or gives you a hard time, deep down they cherish this affection. Keep it up and it will become part of your family culture long after they are grown.

Tip 4: Put in the time.

Just because your teen now seems to have a life outside of you, don't stop planning special adventures for the two of you and your family. Begin by taking a few minutes to answer these questions about your teen:

If he had a day to himself, what would he do all day?

When does he ask for help?

When does he feel the most alive? What makes him tick?

If he was sad and bummed out, what would he want me to do right then to help?

How does my teen like to be touched?

What are my teens favorite things?

What does my teen most want to hear from me?

What does he like to do with me?

If you don't know the answers to all of the questions, ask your teen. Use this information to enjoy the last few years you get together before your teen's life takes a new focus.

Tip 5: Get comfortable.

He said WHAT???. Let your teen know you can take it. Ask your child about things you think are on his mind, even if you aren't sure. For example, if you think your child is masturbating, you can say, "It's normal to want to learn about your own body. Sometimes this means touching yourself. Is this something you've been wondering about or doing? I want you to know you can talk with me about it. There's nothing you can do that I haven't

done myself." No matter the topic, let your child know you are ready to listen from a place of non-judgment, even if it is something you never experienced yourself.

Tip 6: Be the house to be at.

Open door. Provide food. Let them have fun. Repeat. Make your home the place to go for teens. Stock the fridge, be friendly and open, and continue to extend the regular invitation. Let your children know you want their friends at your house. Teens can be interested in a wide variety of things. Accommodate your teen and his or her friends' interests with gusto. Show them you are willing to expend your time, treasure, and talent to help them enjoy their off-time in your home. No matter how small or grand, teens crave a place that feels like home.

Tip 7: Step into fear.

Your teen is afraid of things. Let your up-and-comer know that you can relate. Acknowledge their fears and help them extrapolate them through empowering questions. One of the best is, "What is the worst thing that might happen in this situation?" Usually, it's not that bad. If it is, talk about how realistic it is that the scenario will come true. And, brainstorm steps for moving forward.

Tip 8: Talk every day.

Don't let days turn into weeks that you don't have meaningful conversations with your active teen. Keep your finger on the pulse. Make it your goal to have one conversation per day that does not relate to their schedule or routine type things, or to what they need to do, or not do. Connect with them by saying, "Tell me something new." If they say, "Nothing's new." Say something new about you, then ask them to think of one thing, or engage them in a conversation about current events. Be persistent so they know you are still willing to invest the time even when they rebuff you or seem disinterested at first. Show them they are worth your applied effort.

Tip 9: Pay attention.

If your child seems depressed or begins behaving differently, it's time to act. Don't chalk it up to them "being a teenager." Parents go wrong when they don't trust their gut. If you sense a downward spiral in your child, you are likely on track. Ask questions. Seek outside support from a reputable therapist or life coach, and go from there.

Tip 10: Be love.

Help your teen clean their room. Bring them something from home that they forgot to bring to school. Tell them how nice they look or how proud you are of something they said or did. Leave a little treat on their pillow you know they will enjoy. Write uplifting

words with a dry erase marker onto their bathroom mirror. Give them a shoulder rub, or whatever is needed based on their sport, to show them you value them and will care for them physically. Write them a small card and slip it in their backpack or on place it in front of their speedometer. Treat love as a verb. Step into loving practice and be the love you want to feel from them.