

# Listening and Connecting With Your Teen



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As teens grow and mature, their development centers on building their support network (circle of friends and family), focusing on themselves and their appearance, and learning new skills and abilities. They are building on their strengths and developing emotionally.

Change is a large part of growing during these teen years. Caregivers need to realize teens are changing. Thinking of your child as a teen growing into an adult is hard. Along with a teenager's physical growth comes emotional growth and independence. This is a time when teenagers focus on becoming independent, practicing skills, learning how to socialize, deciding what they like, and most of all, trying to figure out where they belong in the world.

The teen years are a time when caregivers might need to re-evaluate their teen's role within the family and make adjustments because of the teen's development. For example, you may need to take time to "tweak" the

chore list and responsibility level to match your teen's abilities (See "Basic Family Chores and Responsibilities"). Caregivers need to recognize teens' independence and focus on their strengths while encouraging this growth.



*Getting to Know  
Your Teen –*

## **Talking Together**

So, how do you become more aware of your teen's abilities? Where do you start?

Start by taking time to listen. This can be difficult to do. Some people have to learn how to do it. Our world is so fast paced that slowing down and really hearing every word can be a difficult task. Try just listening to a conversation and replying only with "yes," "no" or "I see where you are coming from." This will allow you to focus

on the conversation (the actual words) more and allow your teens the time to talk and express themselves. Listening can help place value on your teens' words and thoughts. Through active listening you can see what your teens' concerns are, what their fears are and how connected they feel to their world.

### *Getting to Know Your Teen –* **Spending Time Together**

Spending time together and really getting to know each other can help your relationship to grow. This may sound more difficult than it is. Because teens usually have friends to hang out

with and other things going on in their lives, often finding the time to spend together can be difficult. However, finding places where you can squeeze into your teen's schedule is important. Some examples of how you might create more time together:

- Drive your teen to school.
- Listen to your teen tell jokes while cooking dinner.
- Ask your teen to help clean around the house with you.
- Watch your teen play a sport.
- Drive your teen to a sporting event and talk while you are in the car. This can be a great place for open communication (conversations) to take place because it is not face-to-face conversation, but more

side-by-side conversation (which is less threatening).

Trying to find moments that show you are involved and interested in your teens' life and that you value them is important. This will send a message that you really care.

### *Getting to Know Your Teen –* **Sharing Family Chores**

Sometimes with work, chores, meals and bills, life can get kind of hectic. However, the teen years are a time when including your child can be very helpful to everyone, plus it will free up more time for everyone to **spend together**. Teens can learn to improve their household skills, such as cutting up vegetables for dinner, using the microwave, preparing a portion of the meal or cleaning the living room.

You need to be available to answer any questions that come up or just provide guidance and supervision. Having you next to them will show your teens that you care. It also is a great time to bond and learn more about one another, and to experience the added

bonus of seeing what types of skills your teen has developed. You will be able to see how your teens have changed in areas such as the ability to think, interact with others and express themselves.



#### **Examples of what to do in spending time together**

- ✓ play a game together
- ✓ review homework together
- ✓ make a snack together
- ✓ go for a bike ride together
- ✓ take out the garbage together
- ✓ go to the park and play ball together
- ✓ play cards together
- ✓ clean out the garage together
- ✓ read a novel together (you read one chapter and your teen the next)
- ✓ spend a day together without watching television or answering the phone
- ✓ go to the video store and walk around together, talking about the movies
- ✓ talk about the summer events in which your teen would like to be involved
- ✓ go together to an event (parade, carnival) that is happening in another town
- ✓ go to the movies together – take turns picking which one to see
- ✓ ask them to pick a meal and then go to the store together, buy everything you need and then prepare the meal together

So, how do you get your teens off the couch or away from the video games? You can start by letting them know that you need a helper. Remind them that a family is a team that works together to get all the jobs done. More hands helping do the daily chores means more time will be available for the family to do fun things. You might have to turn off the video game or unplug the television to get them interested, but be prepared for some resistance at first. Change can be difficult, especially in the beginning.

Now think about your teens' current abilities and try to match them to the level of responsibility in each task. This will allow them to practice

more difficult tasks with you right by their side, ready and willing to answer any questions or give guidance.

You know your teen best. Evaluating what skills and maturity your child possesses is important. Taking the time to see if your teen is ready to be responsible and able to follow safety rules in several situations will promote independence in your teen.

Responsibility levels are different at different ages and with different children. Every child, from the 2-year-old who is learning the power of the word "NO!" to teenagers who are learning to be more

responsible for their own actions, has a natural instinct to become more independent.

No clear-cut guidelines are available to show at exactly what age children should be doing things by themselves. This is where you know your teens best and doing things with them allows you to see what level of responsibility will match their development. Finding out the state regulations (see phone numbers on the next page) on being home alone and knowing your child best will help determine what is appropriate and at what age.

## Basic Family Chores and Responsibilities

These are examples of basic responsibilities. Older teens will need more advanced responsibilities to match their development.

Family Chore and Ability of Teen	Responsibility Level
Cooking .....	Able to use a microwave or stove with supervision
Chopping vegetables .....	Able to use a cutting knife without getting cut
Washing dishes .....	Able to scrub with the washrag and not drop a dish
Sorting clothes .....	Can see colors and categorize, along with following several directions
Taking out the garbage .....	Strong enough to put the garbage in the trash bin
Dusting or cleaning .....	Able to focus on not breaking the fragile items
Staying home alone for small amounts of time .....	Your teens must feel comfortable with this. They should be able to practice safety in a variety of situations and know how to access help if necessary. A first-aid course or CPR class can help provide useful skills
Washing clothes .....	Can turn on and run the washer without forgetting the soap or overfilling the washer with water and clothes

## Conclusion

If these techniques are not working for your family, *seek additional help* through other resources. Valuable resources include your support system, such as family, friends, neighbors and community professionals. Helpful information always is available in books, newsletters and classes, and through family counseling or therapy. Counseling can provide families with additional tools to overcome difficult times.

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## Helpful Phone Numbers

- **North Dakota Helpline**  
2-1-1 or (800) 472-2911
- **Badlands Human Service Center**  
(888) 227-7525
- **Or call your local NDSU Extension Service county office to find phone numbers for agencies that can assist you.**
  - Regional Parent Resource Centers also have information and phone numbers of other agencies to assist you.

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## Helpful Resources for Parents

Jones, Alanna. (1998). *104 activities that build: self-esteem, teamwork, communication, anger management, self-discovery, and coping*; Richland, Wash.: Rec Room Publishing

Lott, Lynn and Intener, Riki. (2005). *Chores without wars: Turning housework into teamwork*; New York, N.Y.: Taylor Trade Publishing

**To learn more about regulations for leaving your child home alone, please call**

North Dakota Department of Human Services – Children and Family Services Division  
(701) 328-2316

Prevent Child Abuse ND  
(800) 403-9932 or (701) 223-9052

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