

20 Ways to Connect With Your Teen

Connecting is a fundamental element in any relationship, providing depth and a sense of wellbeing. Of course, connections cannot be demanded or fabricated, they occur naturally within the normal rhythms of life. Although your teen *should* separate from you as he grows, *separation* does not have to mean *disconnection*!

That being said, many parents find it increasingly difficult to connect with their kids during this age. And yet, all research indicates that the most significant influence on the life of a teenager comes from his or her parents – your teen needs you now more than ever!

Humbly open your heart to examine how you express love to and attempt to connect with your son or daughter. Though your intentions may be good, he or she may not perceive your actions or words as loving. Try some or all of the following suggestions. How well would your teen say that you connect in each of these ways...?

1. Never mock the things that he has taken seriously.
2. Know his strongest love language, and intentionally seek to love him in that way.
3. When you give him your love, give it freely from a place of abundance. Loving someone unconditionally is *not* about you.
4. Be consistent and frequent in your intention to connect. The priority you make for connection will demonstrate the value you place on the relationship.
5. Be available to your teen. When your teen asks for your help or your attention, do you make yourself available to him? If you cannot immediately break from your task at hand, let him know that his question/concern is important to you, give him a time when you will be available, and then follow through!
6. Take an interest in his interests. Ask good questions to help you understand what he finds interesting about it.
7. When you spend time together, let him pick the activity, show, restaurant, etc. Be a good sport – focus more on enjoying his presence, not how the activity, movie, or food is not to your liking!
8. Be transparent. My daughter always asks me to tell her a story, but then I go blank! So now, when she requests a story, I tell her to “ask me a question!” For those of us who are not natural, on-the-spot storytellers, this usually helps my mind to retrieve a story.

9. When you sense yourself becoming angry or frustrated with your teen, deal with yourself first before you deal with your teenager. (Matthew 7:3-5)
10. When you do talk about issues, after preparing yourself, talk with your teen in the right place at the right time, preferably where he is comfortable. Don't squeeze these important talks into busy moments or on the fly. Don't do them in front of other people.
11. Seek to understand his heart. This is an age of discovery for him that is often extremely confusing. Help him in his journey of better understanding who he is by being curious yourself!
12. Ask open questions. Caution: An open question will elicit many different answers. Don't be tied to hearing the answer *you* would like to hear. You don't have to agree with his answers, just receive them.
13. Listen for his heart. To be able to hear his heart, you'll need to stop talking. To be able to hear deeply, you'll need to squelch the voice in your head preparing a response. You'll need to stop advising, stop problem-solving, stop lecturing, stop elaborating, and just listen.
14. Seek clarity in what you heard. After listening to him, reflect back to him what you heard and understood, and give him permission to clarify. We all interpret words in different ways – our personalities, life experiences, culture, up-bringing, etc. all affect the way in which we filter what we hear.
15. Catch him doing something right and encourage him!
16. Pray daily with him and for him.
17. Greet him warmly. Even if he is not a "morning" person, or returns home in a foul mood every day, maintain and initiate the everyday "niceties".
18. Always extend a warm "good bye" and "good night." We never know if it will be our last.
19. When you do talk, don't flash your authority or the right you have to tell him what to do. Rather, talk to him in a way that lifts up truth and points out its beauty.
20. Enter the world of your teenager and stay there. Watch for and expect God to show up as well!