

Using Movies to Talk to Teens

The Dos and Don'ts of Talking to Teens

Once you've launched a conversation with your teenager about a sticky subject, it isn't smooth sailing. What you do during the conversation is as important as how you start it. This email suggests some Dos and Don'ts for successful conversations with your child. It isn't an exhaustive list, but there is probably something new you can apply to your next discussion. Do keep in mind, however, that everyone has a different conversation style. It is up to you to adapt the following tips to your personality and your child's needs.

Do bite your tongue - sometimes. While there will be times to jump in and correct a glaringly false assumption your child makes...more often than not, bite your tongue. Think about how you feel when you are corrected. Now think about how you would feel if you were corrected ALL THE TIME. After a while, if you're like me, you stop sharing. By biting your tongue occasionally (and substituting the noncommittal "Hmm, interesting") you give your teen space to share what they are thinking without feeling like an idiot.

Don't belittle your teen. Few people receive instruction well when they are disrespected or when someone discounts our experience or intelligence. Yes, your child is a child - young, less experienced, physically immature, and hormonally emotional. But pointing that out is neither helpful nor does it validate their perspective - which to them is the most important one there is. Avoid statements like: "You only think that because you are young"; "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard"; "You're being irrational/emotional/ridiculous"; or "You don't know what you are talking about."

Do correct your teen when she is way off course. While you don't want your child to feel wrong all the time, these conversations are your chance to help steer your child in the right direction. Offering "Well, did you know..."; or "It seems that way, but..."; or "But have you ever considered..." statements allows you to gently impart your parental wisdom and guidance. Used sparingly but at the right times, they are more powerful than advertising, believe it or not.

Don't multitask - specifically don't have multiple conversations simultaneously. It is fine to talk while driving, walking, fishing, eating, crafting or doing any other tasks traditionally associated with facilitating conversation, but texting, checking email or social media, and most electronic games are a "No-no." It is too easy to be distracted, ignore super-important but subtle cues from your child, and it doesn't offer your teen the respect and attention they secretly (or not so secretly) crave.

The next movie we'll introduce you to is a lesser known documentary that offers food for discussion and has a lot of lessons for parents and teens to learn. The issues it raises are a little easier to discuss, so enjoy practicing these Dos and Don'ts!