

Communication Tips for Parents, Teens and Young Adults
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The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

George Bernard Shaw

Q: *I'm a university student and I live at home with my parents on weekends. We argue about many things in my life. I know they care about me, but I don't think they're listening to me. They don't seem to get that I am now an adult and can make decisions for myself. I'm finding it harder to talk to them. Can you help?*

A: This time/stage for a family, when children become young adults, is a challenging time for many young people and their parents. All are in transition from one phase of life to another, and generally will be experiencing this in ways that are different and ways that are similar. The differences can create conflict in the relationship between parents and young people.

Generally young adults (e.g., 19-24 years) experience personal development that creates the need for greater independence from parents. For instance, increased need and desire to make decisions about daily living and major life events that as teens and children were made, or mostly made, by parents.

Generally, it can take some time for parents to fully recognize a young person's

decision-making needs and capabilities. They may believe it is still their responsibility and right to make specific/most/all decisions past the late teens and early 20s.

Parents sometimes feel a sense of loss when their growing son or daughter needs them less, and may react with attempts to control (e.g., make more decisions).

Unfortunately, there is no ultimate parenting guide available for parents. Nor is there a guide for young adults. Even if there were it would be important that each family find what works best for them, to meet the needs of all involved family members.

These conflicted and challenging times can be considered opportunities to improve the relationships between young people and parents. Engaging in discussion with parents is a way for young adults to demonstrate positive adult qualities (e.g., being responsible), practice good communication skills, and meet the need for increased choice/decision-making. Many people find that stepping up and initiating solutions in positive ways improves self-respect, and self confidence.

Communication Tips:

- Respond assertively (not aggressively) with issues that are important to you, which can help relieve some of the related tension and stress.
- Plan and prepare before re-opening the communication on the issue (e.g., what you want/need).
- Choose an appropriate time and place to have a discussion (e.g., when able to give undivided attention, at less stressful times of the day).
- Relax yourself beforehand, and remain calm during the conversation. When emotions are under control/contained, it is easier to think and communicate more effectively. Communicate your willingness to understand the other's point of view (this doesn't necessarily mean you're agreeing yet, just opening yourself to hear their thoughts).
- Give them the respect you want from them/others, such as listening attentively to their opinions. When listening, try to understand their point of view and how they feel about it.
- When speaking use "I" statements, state/describe what you need, why it's important to you, and how you feel about it. For example, "Now that I'm a college student, and paying my own tuition, I need to

decide which courses I will take next semester. I feel frustrated when I am excluded from this decision".

- Try not to judge or blame your parents. Judgement and blame puts people on the defensive, and can inflame emotions (yours and theirs).

An important note about personal safety: If you are concerned for your safety with a parent (or any other person/adult), you need to take precautions to protect yourself first. For instance, if your parent has been violent, or aggressive in some other way towards you or other family members, it is important to seek the direct support and guidance of another adult you can trust (e.g., teacher, adult relative, counsellor) to determine the best course of action in your particular circumstances. If safety is not your concern you may find it useful to seek additional support and guidance from a Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC) to help you with your specific problem.

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