

The Right Way for Parents to Question Their Teenagers

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Any parent of a teenager knows that it can be a struggle to get them to open up. It's natural for adolescents to pull away from their parents as they begin to build their own identities and test their burgeoning independence. But a growing body of research finds that maintaining open communication with adolescents is crucial to their mental health and well-being. Teens who disclose their daily activities and inner feelings to a parent tend to have lower levels of anxiety and depression and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

How should parents handle these years? Researchers point to a number of things they can do to increase the odds that their teens will confide in them—as well as behaviors to avoid because they can inhibit conversation.

“Even as teens expand their social network, parents need to know that they still remain their child's primary source of support,” says Ashley Ebbert of Arizona State University. In a study published last month in the journal *Development and Psychopathology*, Ms. Ebbert, along with her co-authors, Drs. Frank Infurna and Suniya Luthar, found that when a teen views parents as disengaged, it can lead to a breakdown of trust and communication and have a negative impact on teens' mental health.