



## How to Keep Communication Honest



# Being There for Your Teenager

The adolescent years are tough on everyone—parents and teens alike. Through trial and error, our sons and daughters seek their independence. We learn how to let go.

Mutual trust, a healthy respect for personal privacy and open communication can make the passage easier.

### What Kids Want to Tell You

Teens face many challenges as they approach adulthood. Here are some of those challenges and ways you can help:

- 1. NORMAL BODY CHANGES** You can reassure them, avoiding jokes about obvious physical changes.
- 2. ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS** Be a good role model and get as much information as you can. Talk about the effects of alcohol and drugs on the body and the dangers of driving under the influence. Consider getting involved in groups such as Students Against Driving Drunk.

- 3. SOCIAL STATUS** Shy, insecure teens can be encouraged to join clubs or activity groups where making friends is easier.

- 4. ROMANCE** Teen love is serious. Breakups are devastating. Your sympathy can help defuse anger and depression.

- 5. SEX** Plenty of love at home can make it less urgent to find love through sexual encounters. You can explain how fear of pregnancy and disease changes relationships. Both of you may be embarrassed at first. But related issues can open the door. Then be as specific as you can.

- 6. BIRTH CONTROL AND DISEASE PREVENTION** Teens are often misinformed about the consequences of sex. If it's difficult to talk about it, you can say so and provide the facts with pamphlets or books.

- 7. TROUBLE** Often a single run-in with the law, or an act of petty vandal-

ism, is a one-time test of teenage bravado. You may find consistent disapproval works best. But overreaction can shut down communication. Ask for help when you need it.

### How Parents Can Open Doors

Special family activities, or a time when you do chores together, offer natural opportunities for conversation. Checking in without prying, teasing or blaming lets a teenager know you're interested.

You can listen and sympathize when he or she approaches you. You can praise whenever possible. Teens are typically secretive and independent. Your respect, trust and attention say you're ready to help.

### Hard Choices Made Easier

When to take a stand, when to argue, and when to let go are hard choices for parents. Your personal guidelines might include:

- Is the issue negotiable?
- Is an argument productive?
- Is the behavior harmful?
- Is experience going to prove the best teacher?
- Is there a positive approach?

As in any relationship, constructive criticism is easier to take. The trick is to say that something was wrong without saying the one who did it is hopeless.

### They Need You and Love You

You can help your teen mature with love and trust as the basis of your relationship. A positive attitude and realistic expectations are important. Open communication is the key.

Equally important is the support available to you outside the home. Parent groups, school and community counselors can give you ideas and skills. For drug and alcohol problems, 24-hour service lines are listed in the telephone directory.