

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEENAGERS

Parents often call with concerns about the behaviour of teenagers. These concerns can range from what we might describe as ‘typical’ teenage behaviour such as staying out late, being cheeky or rude and at times to more extreme behaviour, violence and aggression. Parents also talk about worries about their children’s friends, relationships and sexual health issues.

Being the parent of a teenager isn’t always easy; but then, neither is being a teenager. Above all else, callers to the helpline want to improve the situation at home for themselves and the rest of their family.

ParentLine’s service reaches out to all parents in every part of Scotland, including the most isolated communities and allows parents the opportunity to talk about their feelings and to get the information and help they need.

Communication with teenagers often seems impossible to callers. Remember that trying to understand the young person’s behaviour and considering different approaches will help you best react to your child becoming a teenager.

Why can the teenage years be difficult for you and your teenager?

Being a teenager is about maturing towards adult life. Teenagers have to deal with lots of issues, such as:

- Dealing with relationships
- Sexual feelings and a changing body
- Working out a system of their own values and morals, which may be different from yours
- Learning new life skills
- Forming a new adult relationship with you that will be the basis of your future together

Remember that through the teenage years you will be helping to guide your child towards adult life and will gradually hand over responsibilities and independence when your teenager shows they are ready. This can be difficult for both of you.

If you understand and accept that some conflict is probably inevitable, you will be better prepared for it.

Why is communication important and how is it possible?

Communication is the key to good family relationships. Without being able to talk and listen, your teenager cannot let you know what they need, you can’t offer support and together you cannot negotiate over boundaries and acceptable behaviour.

Communication both spoken and unspoken goes on all the time and body language, gestures and eye contact are all equally important.

- If you want to talk, agree a convenient time – not when one of you is clearly involved in something else.
- Try to spend time alone without distractions from other family members.
- Use ‘open’ questions to avoid yes/no responses. ‘how did it go?’ rather than ‘did it go okay?’
- Don’t fly off the handle if you don’t like what you hear - this is the surest way to close down communication.
- When you both have different viewpoints, try to work together to find a compromise.
- ‘Active listening’ is about looking beyond the words for what is really being felt and said.



Teenagers may lash out against your authority and boundaries. Your task is to provide a consistent, safe and supportive environment for them to do this – it’s not easy but you can survive!

- Try to be tolerant about experimental behaviour as long as it is safe. It’s all part of your teenager growing up and helps equip them for adulthood.
- Respect the need for privacy and give them space – they might not want to tell you everything.
- Be consistent in discipline: idle threats don’t work.
- Clearly state boundaries but be prepared to discuss them with your teenager from time to time.
- Teenagers are not always able to tell you what’s wrong as they may not be exactly sure why they are acting the way they are.

Remember inside every teenager is still the child you know. Enjoy them as young adults and prize their achievements - they may open up a whole new world to you!

Contact us

The helpline can be contacted on:
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The helpline opening hours are:
Monday to Friday: 9am-10pm
Saturday and Sunday: 12noon-8pm



We can help you take action to achieve change where it is needed.

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