

Effective Communication with Teens

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Each day holds opportunities to talk to teens about the importance of respect for their God-given bodies and how all life is held in highest regard. Building up a teen’s self esteem and a sense of great purpose, dignity, and uniqueness comes with honest, open communication. Feedback about their behavior is crucial in forming responsible young adults. Here are some helpful hints when communicating with your teen:

Be Honest and Encourage Openness	Focus on Positive Behavior	Be Clear and Specific	Increase Understanding	Use Communication as Learning Opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be honest in telling them what he or she did well. • Don’t say something was well done when you don’t believe it was. • Don’t focus exclusively on ineffective behaviors or only on positive behaviors. • Ask open-ended questions. Use what, when, where, why, and how to begin questions and not will, do, does, would, and have. The first group invites elaboration; the second elicits limited yes or no responses. • Balance statements which offer opportunity for openness. Say things like, “Some teens feel scared and frustrated about this while others feel excited and energized by this.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praise only those efforts and behaviors you sincerely believe were well executed. • Offer gentle, but firm and respectful constructive ways to improve other efforts and behavior. • Help correct ineffective behavior by offering alternative behaviors. • Offer two positive suggestions for every suggestion for improvement. • Begin and end feedback with a positive statement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific about what was actually said or done. • Be specific about why the action or behavior was or would be effective. • Be clear about what could have been said or done instead, if constructive criticism is offered. • Ask for specific examples. • Ask for clarification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listen to your teens with full attention, not just with your ears, but with all of your senses— employ direct eye contact. ▪ Don’t reject feedback when you disagree... model receiving feedback in a non-defensive manner. ▪ Don’t guess at motives or assume anything. Ask direct questions and explore all opportunities to allow them to talk about how they think and feel. ▪ Paraphrase the content of the teen’s message to check if you are hearing what they intend to say. ▪ Periodically assess understanding of the message you are trying to convey. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View each opportunity as a learning experience for all involved. • Be curious about differing views, yet be clear and firm about your own values, views, and family rules. • Provide words for feelings and the affective part of what the teen struggles to articulate, for example “It can make some people really angry to talk about how they dress. I am wondering how you feel?” • Normalize the feelings of your teen and reassuring them by saying, “Many kids feel like you do...” • Ask the teen about how they can apply this message to their own stories and life experiences.

As cited in *Protecting God’s Children for Adults* VIRTUS training bulletin