



Toolkit for Parenting Teenagers
Tip Sheet #7: Having Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations cover both embarrassing and controversial topics that may come up between you and your teen. It's normal to feel uncomfortable talking to your teenager about drugs, dating, and other issues. Having an open dialogue is important and can give you the opportunity to guide your teen towards more healthy and happy decisions. Below are a few suggestions to help when faced with these conversations:

1. **Stay calm.** It is okay to acknowledge that you are shocked by a topic your teen may bring up, but it is also important to reassure them that you do want to discuss the issue.
2. **Listen.** Give your teen a chance to talk through what is going on. Instead of trying to immediately fix things, try listening to understand your teen's perspective on the issue.
3. **Inquire.** Develop an attitude of curiosity and try to learn as much as possible. Ask questions such as "How does that make you feel?" or "How did you handle the situation?"
4. **Refrain from judgment.** Try to avoid being critical or becoming emotional. During this time, the focus should be on your teen and how they feel. Let them know you appreciate that they trust you with this information. If you need to talk to someone, reach out to another adult or someone else who is a part of your support system.
5. **Bring up hard topics in the right setting.** Conversations don't always have to take place while sitting down. Often it is easier for teens to talk in a setting where they are comfortable. Try taking them out for ice cream or spend the day with them doing another activity, it will help them relax and open-up.
6. **Thank them for their honesty.** A thank you and/or compliment can go a long way and may help develop more of an open dialogue. Showing your teen that you appreciate their honesty can lead them to talk to you further the next time they're confronted with a difficult situation.