

Keeping Close Through Adolescence and Beyond

by Kathleen McCoy, Ph.D.

Even though your teenager is growing up, and in a sense, growing away, there are still ways you can reaffirm and maintain family unity -- now and in the future. How can you do this?

- Face your problems together as a family. Don't let denial or blame come between you. Facing pain together can enhance your closeness.
- Let happy memories lead you back to positive feelings about each other. Recalling happy memories can make a wonderful difference when you're in the middle, or aftermath, of a crisis. Remembering when you felt warm, loving and connected can be a unifying factor.
- Give family time top priority -- even though you're all busy.
- Get to know each other in new ways. Share feelings, stories of the past, dreams for the future.
- Get involved in causes and altruistic activities as a family.
- Finally, let family rituals, from traditions to nicknames bring you together again and again. Rituals are unifying. They can be shortcuts to good feelings, close ties and happy memories.

Getting Teens To Open Up and Talk

by Evelyn Petersen

Some people were brought up in families that practiced daily conversations. Teens are bombarded with sounds. They may relish moments of silence and reflection. So you may find that getting your teen to converse with you is like pulling teeth. Sometimes school and family are the last things they want to talk about. Your child might even want to talk to someone about her fears, hopes or dreams . . . someone who will just listen with interest.

Go to the library and read "Introvert or Extrovert" by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, an article in the February 1992 issue of Working Mother magazine. If your child is more of an introvert, she needs quiet time and time alone to recharge her energy. If she is an extrovert, she charges up by talking with others.

On the other hand, the problem many parents have may simply be the topics of conversation. Teens don't always like to be the topic under discussion. Try talking about your memories of being a teen.

This will take the pressure off her and put the focus on you. It may also open the door if she wants to tell you about something important to her.

Tips on Communicating with Adolescents and Teens

by Evelyn Petersen

Busy, overloaded days often make us unaware that family communication is suffering. Congratulations to those parents who take notice and want to improve the situation. However maybe it is more the "what" than the "how" that's the problem.

For example, if you ask parents to list what they talk with their school aged children or adolescents on a given day, most conversations are about school performance, reminders of chores or things to do, curfews, the parent's plans for the child's future, and plans for family events. Very little if any time is spent listening to the child's interests, feelings, ideas or plans, and little time is spent discussing feelings or praising children.

The biggest hurdle to good communication with children who are on the way to adolescence is our obsession to instruct and inform them, instead of talking and listening to them. Yes, we do have important things to tell them that they need to hear, but this "taking care of business mode" must be balanced with communication that says, "What you think and feel and enjoy are important to me because I love you and the person you are becoming." We have to remember that kids really don't care what you know (even if you know a lot) unless they know you care.

Good communication with kids this age is not easy, but it's worth the effort. Good communication must include meaningful praise; it must include sharing our feelings and talking about what we stand for and believe in, and it must include sincere and genuine listening.

Keeping Close By Making Happy Family Memories by Kathleen McCoy, Ph.D.

Creating happy memories as a family can be rich reserve of good will to draw on during stressful times. These don't have to mean peak experiences - they can be simple moments, family traditions and activities you enjoy together.

Creating happy memories can mean doing something alone with your teen, going to a concert or out to lunch. It may mean taking a walk together, sharing vulnerable feelings or stories, learning a sport together, singing together, or just playing together. Happy memories can come from family picnics, holiday or everyday rituals. Happy memories can give a teen strength during difficult times since he knows in his heart that he's safe and loved within his family.

There will come a time when memories will be all your son or daughter has of your days together. Try to make the most of these memories, memories of joy and of love.

Dealing Effectively with Moody Teenagers

by Evelyn Petersen

At about 15 many teens go through a period of being introspective and moody. They seem to be thinking through how they feel about themselves and figuring out how this perception matches with what others think of them. Most of them work through this and come to terms with their self-image by age 16.

Ups and downs during the teen years are normal, and if a young girl has a previous history of confidence, she can probably handle the ups and downs just fine. However, do watch for signs of serious depression, such as noticeable changes in her grades, her friends, her eating and sleeping habits, her grooming, etc. A combination of these symptoms could be signs of stress or of drug use.

Teens who cope best with their moods have parents who take time to listen and talk, parents who respect them and who are in turn respected. These are parents who are responsible, and who expect their kids to be responsible too.

It's true that straight ahead compliments are not always taken graciously by teens, but they still need them. Make praise genuine, descriptive and meaningful. All of the following tips are other ways you can compliment your teen and build self-esteem.

- Respect her growing need for privacy in both thinking and space.
- Encourage her to have her friends over as often as possible. (In a way this is actually a compliment.)
- Show her you love her for who she is as a person, not just for what she can achieve.
- Don't do something for her that she can do for herself.
- Don't manage her time for her; teach her to manage her own time.
- Be accessible for conversation any time, any place.
- Brainstorm together and problem solve. Show genuine respect for her ideas, even if you disagree or don't use all of them.
- Make sure she knows that you believe she can make choices in her own best long term interest.
- Show confidence in her judgment whenever possible.
- Expect her best and praise her for giving it.