

## TALKING WITH A TEEENAGE SON

So it's time to sit down and have a face-to-face chat with your teenage son. Actually, there might be a better option.

Now the public service announcements on television make it sound like the best approach is to just start a conversation about drugs or alcohol at the breakfast table. But most teenagers would just roll their eyes—and probably tune you out.

Getting your teenage son to talk with you can be one of the greatest challenges of your fathering career, but it is doable. How do you bridge the gap? Let's look at three suggestions.

The first one is a paradox: to get your teenage son to talk, don't try to get him to talk. Sure, face-to-face chats are great if you can pull 'em off. But usually, the best approach is to talk sideways. A teenage boy will talk to you much more easily while you're working on a project together or doing something fun. So, enlist his help as you work on the car; shoot some baskets; hang drywall; run errands together; join him in something he wants to do. Suddenly, he'll bring up something that's been on his mind or willingly respond to a question you throw out.

Second, watch for cues that he's ready to talk. For example, if he's had enough sleep that will probably make a big difference. Or maybe he talks more at a certain time of the day, or when he's in a particular mood. The cues may be subtle, but you can learn to spot them.

Third, be available. He may have a pressing question at eleven o'clock at night—or at three in the morning. His concerns may sound hair-brained or trivial or way off the mark. That's okay, dad. Be flexible. Let him know that he can come to you anytime, about anything. Those times maybe rare so be ready. And put aside the newspaper or turn off the TV when it happens. Give him your full attention, eye contact and of all things, keep your lecturing out of the conversation. Remember to listen, listen and love, love.

And finally, a word for dads who don't yet have a teenager: Build a close relationship with your son right now. If it's easy for him to talk to you during these younger years, there won't be a gap to bridge, and that will do a lot to ease the strain once you have a teenager.

This means you can just decide one day to communicate. There has to be a foundation of a relationship and communication. Let's look at this picture: If you scream at your dog, kick him, throw something at it, and "eye him down", guess what, it will be scared of you and hide or try to dig itself in a corner because of fear. So, even though this is a hard picture and you think you never do that, get a camera and grade yourself when you are disciplining your kid...it might surprise you.

**Let me put it in another context. I spend a lot of time in the youth detention centers and adult prisons working with kids and dads about fathering skills. The one common thread are kids talking about how their dads screamed at them and how they never talked to them...scream and yell but not talk. And the dads in the prison (once they figure it out and most do) are the extreme remorse of the lack of relationship and communication with their kids. It is not just the mom's job; it is your job. Buck up, open your mouth, hug your kid, enjoy every moment talking together, walking, playing, swinging and laughing...it is very painful when you look back and both of you have a strained and uncompromising relationship. In the age of communication, dads are having a hard time finding the time and then engaging the mouth with meaningful words of wisdom, love and experience.**

**It is your deal, your responsibility. Let me help you here: When you do (and the time will come to have to do it), it will give you such a rush of excitement and accomplishment and your relationship will explode in intimacy and love. That is being a dad that you're designed to be by the Father.**