

# LISTENING TO TEENS WITH LOVE

Difficulty: **INTENSIVE** | Frequency: **VARIABLE** | Duration: **5 MINS**

## WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Communicating with our teens can be challenging. When we express severe disappointment or lecture teens, this can lead them to **feel inhibited** about disclosing to us in the future because they are worried about a negative reaction.

On the other hand, listening to your teen with empathy and non-judgment can help nurture a sense of intimacy between you and a willingness to disclose to you again. When children feel heard, they feel your support and validation, which can foster their well-being and improve your relationship.

## TIME REQUIRED

This practice can take as little as 5 minutes.

## HOW TO DO IT

As teens move toward becoming more independent from their parents, they tend to be **less inclined** to share personal hardships, like feeling hurt from their friends or doing something wrong. When they do share, it can be a valuable opportunity to show them your love and desire to understand them.

When teens make a bid to talk to you about their challenges, respond by letting them know that you're available for them. You can show that you're really listening—with warmth and non-judgment—by following these eight tips:

1. Make eye contact with your teen as much as possible, while still appearing natural.
2. Lean forward and have responsive body language toward your teen.
3. Sit straight and remain engaged while your teen is talking to you.
4. Keep your full attention on your teen.
5. Nod your head in response to what your teen says to you.
6. Speak slowly and softly.
7. Show empathy through your gestures and body language.
8. Be as natural as possible with your teen.

When your teen is vulnerable with you, it helps to acknowledge the courage it took to do so, by saying things like, "Thank you for being so honest. That must have been hard for you to say. Do you want to tell me more?"

As you're listening attentively, you may sometimes hear teens talk about their regrets. For example, a teen might realize that they acted without thinking things through or they didn't know how to stand up for themselves and felt trapped. You can show them empathy by saying things like, "Ahh. What an intense feeling to have."

With non-judgmental listening, teens can feel open to figure out their own solutions and may make plans about how they might handle a similar situation in the future. You can acknowledge your teen's initiative and reflection by saying things like, "That's a big decision. I'm glad to hear it. Thank you for sharing this with me."

## EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Weinstein, N., Huo, A., & Itzhakov, G. (2021). [Parental listening when adolescents self-disclose: A preregistered experimental study](#). *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 209, 105178.

Teens between 13 and 16 years old were randomly assigned to watch video interactions between a teen describing feeling rejected or doing something wrong and their parent listening either well (with empathy and non-judgment) or not (with apathy and judgment). The study found that teens anticipated feeling greater well-being when imagining self-disclosing to a parent who listened with empathy and non-judgment compared to a parent who listened with apathy and judgment.

## WHY TO TRY IT

Body language is an important way we can strengthen our [relationships](#) with our kids. Showing warm nonverbal communication to our children and also being sensitive to what our kid's nonverbal behavior means can play an important [role](#) in nurturing a sense of emotional security and a loving parent-child bond.

When teens can rely on parents to lend a good listening ear, they feel a sense of freedom and confidence in their capacity for self-expression, as well as a greater sense of connection with their parents. This supports children's basic needs for autonomy (being themselves) and relatedness (feeling closeness), which are [important components of human well-being](#).

## SOURCES

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This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

