

Teens and parents in conversation

HomeWord



Theme: Listening
Question: What would you like to tell your parent(s)/teen(s) if only they would listen to you?



Teen Talk *by Tymmony Keegan*

My mom and I have always been close, and we have a strong friendship. We share a bond that is rooted deeper than that of most mothers and daughters, and because of that, I am able to be completely honest with my mother a majority of the time. However, on occasion I want to say things to her that I just can't bring myself to say, or I do not say them because I feel she will not understand or will not listen.

These are times when I wish my mom would listen to me:

- When we are having an argument
- When I am struggling with school-work
- When I need help
- When I miss her
- When I need her advice
- When I have to vent something
- When I am frustrated
- When I am sad
- When I am happy
- When I have accomplished something
- When I just want to talk

These are just a few instances, but all are equally important to me.


These are some things I want to say but am sometimes just too embarrassed:

- I love you with all my heart.
- Thank you for everything you have done for me.
- Why did you sacrifice so much for so little?

I know that every teenager will relate to at least one item on this list.


- You are my inspiration.
- Thank you for giving me all your support.
- Thank you for giving me wonderful advice.
- Thank you for giving me the important things in life.
- Thank you for giving me so much knowledge.
- Thank you for allowing me to make mistakes (how else would I be so perfect?).
- Thank you for encouraging me.
- Thank you for believing in me, especially when no one else did.
- I am more experienced than you in some aspects of life.
- I am not stupid all the time.
- I respect you enormously.
- Sometimes I just need space to myself. ▼

Parent Talk *by Eileen Pettycrew*



During the months Aunt TC lived with Grandma, I wore out the path through the alfalfa field that separated our houses. Often she was still asleep when I showed up in mid-morning. When she finally got up, she'd shuffle out in robe and slippers, rake long, red fingernails through her frosted, teased hair, yawn widely, and stumble to the counter to pour herself a cup of coffee. I loved everything about her, especially how she listened to me.

Aunt TC made me feel as if I were the only person on earth.



Aunt TC made me feel as if I were the only person on earth. She'd focus her eyes on my face, giving me her undivided attention. She'd ask me questions and listen carefully to my answers. She'd toss back her head and laugh at all the witty things I had to say. She'd stroke my hands and admire my long fingers. She'd tell me I had nice hair. Sometimes we didn't say much at all, but I knew she understood me. Wrapped in her attentive gaze, I felt special and beautiful—soothing balm for a quiet, shy girl like me.


When I was thirteen, Aunt TC offered to take me to her hair stylist for a haircut. For a week I waited in sweet agony until the appointed afternoon arrived. When Aunt TC met me at the door, she said to my mother: "Eileen's been looking forward to this. I can tell."

I was stunned. How could she have known? I had never said a word. But I know she did. To Aunt TC, my soul was transparent. She knew me. She paid attention. It was as if she could hear my secret longings and heartaches even though I never said them out loud. The hair-cut suited me perfectly as Aunt TC must have known it would. I soon found out that I wasn't the only one who felt cherished in Aunt TC's presence. At first I was jealous that she bestowed her attention on various other cousins, but I came to accept that our aunt attracted us all like butterflies to a field of sweet alfalfa. She was an equal-opportunity listener. Her ability to listen never diminished over the years. When I was ▼


Teen Talk *continued*

- Sometimes you need to intrude.
- I am smarter than you think I am.
- I have learned a lot from watching you.
- I hope I can raise my children as well as you raised yours.
- I am sorry for all the pain and misfortune I have caused you.
- Thank you for being so honest with me.
- Thank you for never giving up on me.

I am sure I could think of more examples, but I don't have enough space for all of them. These are the most important ones that I think we should tell our parents more often. With this foundation of honesty comes a layer of trust that most teenagers need in their relationship

with their parents. We all know that the more trust you have,  the more freedom you get because there are not as many worries.

I know that every teenager will relate to at least one item on this list, so make sure that when you see your parents after reading this, you tell them something you are thankful for or appreciate about them. They will thoroughly enjoy your honesty.

Tymmony Keegan is a senior at Seattle Prep High School, in Seattle, Washington. She loves to talk, so if you would like to chat about your relationships with parents or friends, e-mail her at tymmonyk@hotmail.com. 


Tips for Parents

The next time your teen needs your undivided attention, try these tips:

- Stop what you're doing and look your teen in the eyes. Resist the temptation to sneak peeks at your newspaper or to continue your task. Without eye contact, are you really listening?
- Admit it if your attention wanders. Tell your teen that you got distracted, and ask for a recap. Most likely, rather than being annoyed, your teen will appreciate your honesty and know you are really trying to give your full attention.
- Allow your teen to talk freely without interruption. When your teen has finished talking, reflect back what you just heard, asking for clarification if necessary.
- Listen without offering solutions or judgments. Often what your teen needs is an attentive listener who can offer empathy and support.
- Keep your emotions in check while your teen is talking, especially if your teen brings up a touchy subject. A strong reaction from you before your teen is finished sharing can shut down any further communication.

—Eileen Pettycrew

Parent Talk *continued*

pregnant with my first daughter in 1989, I spent a few days in San Francisco at a work-related conference, and I visited Aunt TC and my uncle over the weekend. On my last evening there, we spent hours talking at the kitchen table. When I spoke,  she hung on my every word. Empathy poured from her heart into mine. Her mouth, pursed in understanding, told me she wasn't waiting to jump in and blurt her own prepared statement the minute I paused. She listened with her whole heart, and my heart fit neatly inside hers.

Is Aunt TC's gift for listening something she was born with or something she cultivated? I don't know. I do know that as a wife,

parent, friend, daughter, and sister, I often struggle to set aside my own agenda to truly listen to someone else.

But I remember the gift Aunt TC gave to me when I was a young teen, a gift I want to pass on to my own daughters. I want them to feel as welcome and as safe with me as the butterflies that danced and dived over the alfalfa fields of my youth. If I can focus my attention and listen with my whole heart—even for only a few moments—then the gift lives on. Thank you, Aunt TC, for showing me the way.

Eileen Pettycrew lives with her family in Portland, Oregon.

The Two-Question Method

No doubt you've heard the term *active listening*. The two-question method is a practical way to use active listening. As your parent or teen is talking to you, think of a question that will further explain what is being said, or that will take the conversation to a deeper level. When you ask a question, you demonstrate that you are listening and are genuinely interested in what your parent or teen is telling you.

Then, as your parent or your teen is responding to the first question, think of another question that stems from the response to the first one. (Caution: Ask questions out of sincere interest. Avoid questions that put the other person on the defensive.) Your questions will take you all the way inside what the other person wants to tell you, and that person will certainly feel heard. Plus, it puts a lot of goodwill in the bank that you may need to draw on later. But remember, you can't exercise the two-question method without listening well.

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Write to *HomeWord*, Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320
E-mail: lkehrwald@smp.org; phone: 800-533-8095