

Staying connected with pre-teens and teenagers

Key points

- **As pre-teens and teenagers gain independence, they often spend less time with their families.**
- **Connecting is about building and strengthening relationships in the pre-teen and teenage years.**
- **You can stay connected through everyday interactions and planned time together.**

Positive relationships and staying connected

In adolescence parents and children often begin to spend more time apart. It's natural for teenagers to want to spend time by themselves, as well as time with friends and other people outside their families.

But teenagers still need strong relationships with parents (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/communicating-relationships/family-relationships/relationships-with-parents-teens>) to feel safe and secure as they meet the challenges of adolescence. Knowing that you're there to love and support them gives your child confidence to try new things, and explore new ideas, interests and relationships.

Staying connected with your teenage child is about **building closeness** in your relationship by being available and responsive to your child. It's more than just spending time around each other.

Connecting can be:

- **casual**, which is when you use everyday interactions to build closeness
- **planned**, which is when you schedule time to do things together that you both enjoy.

It's great to have both kinds of connecting in your relationship with your child.

If you stay connected with your child, you'll be in a good position to pick up on any problems that your child might be having. Your child is also more likely to come to you with problems.



Teenagers who have stable, warm, trusting and open relationships with their parents are better equipped to develop independence and grow into responsible adults. They're also more likely to be successful at handling risky situations like smoking, alcohol and other drug use.

Casual connecting with pre-teens and teenagers

Casual connecting is a way of using everyday interactions to build positive relationships. The best opportunities for casual connecting are when your child starts a conversation with you – this generally means they're in the mood to talk.

Tips for casual connecting

- Stop what you're doing and focus on the moment. For example, put down your phone or shut your computer screen. Even for just a few seconds, give your child your full attention. Connecting works best when you send the message that right now, your child is the most important thing to you.
- Look at your child while they're talking to you. Really listen to what they're saying. This sends the message that what your child has to say is important to you.
- Show interest. Encourage your child to expand on what they're saying, and explore their views, opinions, feelings, expectations or plans.
- [Listen \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/communicating-relationships/communicating/active-listening\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/communicating-relationships/communicating/active-listening), without interrupting, judging or correcting. Your aim is to be with your child, not to give advice or help unless they ask for it.
- Just be there. For example, you might be in the kitchen when your child is studying at the table. Teenagers benefit just from knowing that you're available.
- Keep in touch. For example, send daily text messages if you don't live with your child full time or you're away from home for a while.

You can also actively try to create opportunities for casual connecting. For example, some teenagers find it easier to talk while you're doing something together, like cooking, going for a walk or tidying up. But if your child doesn't want to talk, don't force the conversation. Just wait for another opportunity instead.

Planned connecting with pre-teens and teenagers

Planned connecting shows your child you want to spend time with them.

Busy lives and more time apart can make it difficult to spend fun time together. That's why you need to plan it. Teenagers aren't always enthusiastic about spending time with their parents, but it's worth insisting that they do, at least sometimes.

Tips for planned connecting

- Schedule time together. You need to find a time that suits you both. Initially, it can help to keep the time short.
- Let your child choose what you'll do, and follow their lead. This will motivate your child to want to spend time with you. It's also fun to try activities where your child is the expert – teaching you a new skill can boost your child's confidence.
- Concentrate on enjoying your child's company. Try to be an enthusiastic partner and actively cooperate with what your child is doing. The activity itself is less important than shared fun and talking with your child.
- Be interested and accepting, rather than correcting your child or giving advice. It's not easy to give up the teaching and coaching role, but **this is a time for building and improving your**

relationship. So if you see a mistake or an easier way to do something, let it go without comment.

- Keep trying and stay positive. At first, your child might not be as keen as you to take part in these activities. Keep planned times brief to begin with, and your child will come to enjoy this time with you.

Overcoming obstacles to connecting

Your child avoids spending time with you

Making the most of everyday opportunities to connect – like chatting while you’re driving – can help you get over this hurdle.

If your child is reluctant to spend time with you, you could try the following:

- Keep it brief to begin with. Try a cup of coffee at a favourite café after school, for example.
- Find spontaneous ways to spend some quality time rather than booking it in advance.
- Ask your child come up with some things they’d like to do with you and work through their list.
- Use technology to connect with your child. Sending funny memes or text messages can help you stay connected.
- Don’t give up. It might take a little while but the more time you spend together, the more you can both relax into it.

Your child refuses to talk with you about what they’re doing

You and your child might feel closer if you make the most of casual conversations during the day. Every little chat is an opportunity to listen and talk in a relaxed, positive way.

You feel you’re the only one who’s making an effort

If you’re kind and considerate with your child, this can help create goodwill and positive feelings. Often, simple things make a big difference – for example, saying please, giving hugs, pats on the back, knocking before entering a bedroom, cooking a favourite meal or planning surprise fun activities.

This approach creates a more positive environment, even if your child isn’t joining in. Make a point of doing kind things, even when you don’t feel like it. This sets a great example for your child and also helps them see the value in spending time with you.

And when you feel like you’re the one doing all the work, try to remember that **this phase will usually pass.**

References

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