

Five Things to Help You Have Better Conversations with Youth Ages 15 to 17

FORWARD TOGETHER

Understanding where your child is in their development can help you better approach conversations with them

The world pulls us in many directions. It's easy to forget to check-in and have meaningful conversations with the young people in our lives. Checking in with your kids is important – for them and for you.

Yet, parents and caregivers still worry that anything they say or do with young people will produce only eye-rolls. **Kids from 15 to 17 need your attention and support on their path to adulthood.**

Research shows that young people who feel they have good relationships with adults and peers thrive in school and at home and are less likely to use substances and take other risks.

Here are some ideas for creating strong relationships with youth.

Tip: Try these tips one at a time. Take your time. Remember that they may not work 100 percent of the time, but you'll get credit for trying.

Show them you care and they matter – This is the place where nearly all parents start. You may already be doing this, but it often gets harder since this is the age when young people start pulling away. That's totally normal. **Even if they aren't ready to talk, being there to listen shows that you care.** Don't get too hung up on "quality time." Any kind of time spent, or caring gesture, will get noticed and make a difference. Here are some meaningful ways to show you care:

- When they come to you and want to talk, give them your full attention.
- Stay calm. 15- to 17-year-olds are becoming independent, which explains why they don't want you to solve their problems for them. They do want to know you're listening. Let them explain their challenge first while listening intently. Then ask if they want any advice or help solving the problem.
- Don't talk while they're talking. Just listen to what they have to say.

Challenge them to grow – 15- to 17-year-olds are being pushed in all directions to tackle new academics, new relationships, new sports and new skills. Encourage them to be open to this change. Let them know there may be setbacks along the way and that they can ask for help when something feels intimidating.

- Let them know you expect them to try, not just go through the motions.
- When they fail, remind them that failure is not final and that mistakes lead to growth.

- Challenge yourself, too, and tell them about it. What new things have you taken on lately? How did it go? What did you learn? What didn't you like?

Provide support at all times – Even though they're striking out on their own more, youth want to feel that they have a safety net to fall back on. Consistency. Encouragement. Fair and clear limits. Someone to back them up when they're in trouble.

- Offer them guidance through hard situations like their first break-up or a setback at their after-school job. Encourage them when they try something new, like a hobby, a sport or a tough class.
- Encourage them to speak up for themselves and their needs. Let them know you're there to help when they can't do it alone.
- Provide fair and clear limits on behavior and risk. Talk about why they're important. Young people may say they don't want rules, but most want them, and all need them.

Share power and respect their input – At this age, children start to realize that their parents don't know everything, and they want to try their own way. While they may not fully understand your views and decisions, you're building skills for their later teen years that will empower them.

- Listen to and think about what they are saying. Try to avoid an immediate "no" or a put-down.
- Empower them to lead by asking them to plan an outing or a family meal.

Help broaden their world – The root of the word 'adolescence' means to grow. The teen years are all about exploring their world. Help them find safe opportunities to do just that.

- On good days, offer inspiration. Yes, explore that career. Yes, dream of that trip. Yes, there are possibilities.
- On challenging days, empower them to brainstorm solutions to their problems.
- Connect them with people and experiences that show those possibilities, like meeting with adult mentors or community leaders or participating in free public activities.

Most importantly remember these conversations and relationships are two-way. As a parent or caregiver, you are learning and growing too.

Also, give yourself credit – just taking the time to read this and learn shows your commitment to building better relationships with the young people in your life. Now give some of these tips a try!

Get additional ideas and tips at: ForwardTogetherCO.com