

Connecting with Your Teen

A Guide to *Stronger* *Conversations* and *Deeper* *Relationships*



LENA
POPE



Introduction

Building a strong relationship with your teen can feel like an uphill battle. With the distractions of school, social media, and friendships, finding time to truly connect can be challenging. However, research shows that open communication with parents and caregivers plays a crucial role in a teen's emotional well-being and decision-making. This guide will help you navigate conversations with your teen, build trust, and create a foundation for meaningful dialogue.



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When you can give your child some individual time that builds your relationship with your child. They get to feel special and you're building trust.

Imelda de la Cruz, LCSW



1. The Power of Presence: Show Up, Even When It's Hard

Teens are observant—even when they seem distant. They notice when you make an effort, even if they don't always acknowledge it. The key is consistency. Showing up in their lives, whether through small conversations, shared activities, or simply being available, makes a difference.



Quick Tip: Schedule one-on-one time with your teen each week, even if it's just a short car ride or grabbing a snack together.



2. Conversation Starters to Break the Ice

Sometimes, the hardest part of talking to your teen is just getting started. Here are a few non-intimidating questions to spark conversation:

- *What was the best part of your day today?*
- *If you could switch places with any celebrity for a day, who would it be and why?*
- *What's a song that really speaks to how you're feeling lately?*
- *What's something about school or life that feels overwhelming right now?*
- *If we could go on a road trip anywhere, where would you want to go?*



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I encourage clients to have a check in time each day or a high/low/haha. The most important part is having someone you can talk with about how you are doing each day. That helps us feel connected to others.

Paola Gordillo, LPC, LCDC



Quick Tip: Timing matters. Don't force a conversation during stressful moments. Car rides, shared meals, or casual walks can be great times to talk.



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Too often, parents jump in with advice or try to finish their child's sentences because they are trying to help, but that makes the teen feel like you are not listening or like they are being judged. Instead, focus on listening to understand — not listening to respond.

Elizabeth Zapata, LMSW



3. The No-Judgment Zone: Listen Before You Respond

Teens often hesitate to open up because they fear judgment or immediate advice. Practice active listening by reflecting on what they say before jumping in with a solution.



Try This:

- **Validate:** *"I can see why that would be frustrating."*
- **Ask open-ended questions:** *"How did that make you feel?"*
- **Hold back advice:** *Instead, focus on listening to understand – not listening to respond.*



4. Setting Boundaries with Phones & Social Media

Digital distractions are one of the biggest barriers to meaningful connection. While you may not be able to eliminate screen time, setting small boundaries can help create space for conversation.



Try This:

- Implement a “no phones at the dinner table” rule.
- Have a “phone-free hour” before bedtime to encourage real conversations.
- Suggest a family challenge—who can go the longest without checking their phone?



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It can feel daunting to try and set limits around screens. But it’s setting our kids up for failure to assume they can manage their screen time alone. Creating balance starts at home and it’s never too late to start.

Elizabeth Brown, LPC-S



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Ask your teen to teach you about what they're watching or one of their interests by asking questions and guiding those conversations. This creates far more of a connection instead of just giving them a list of rules or peppering them with questions.

Leslie Cunningham, LCSW



5. Strengthening the Relationship Through Shared Activities

Not all connection has to come from deep conversations. Sometimes, just spending time together can foster trust and understanding.



Ideas to Try:

- *Cook a meal together* and let them choose the recipe.
- *Watch one of their favorite shows* and discuss it.
- *Go for a walk or drive* with their favorite playlist playing.
- *Start a simple family tradition*, like “Friday night ice cream” or weekend board games.



6. Repairing Relationships: It's Never Too Late

If communication has been strained, don't lose hope. Apologizing for past misunderstandings and expressing your desire to rebuild your connection can go a long way.



Try This:

- *"I know we haven't always seen eye to eye, but I want us to work on talking more."*
- *"I don't always get things right, but I want to understand you better."*
- *"I'm here for you — no matter what."*



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We can rekindle relationships, rebuild relationships, restore what may appear to have been lost, and gather it back while they're still at this age. Now is the time to start.

Trey Webster,
Family Specialist

How Well Do I Know My Teen?

Whether you're working to rebuild your relationship or just need help getting the ball rolling, this simple questionnaire is a great way to start.

At Lena Pope, we've found this activity opens the door to meaningful conversations between teens and caregivers. It's not a test — it's an invitation to reflect, listen, and rediscover the small details that make your relationship unique.

Parents and Caregivers

Tell Me About _____ (your teen)

1. Who is your teen's best friend?

2. What is your teen's favorite color?

3. What is their favorite TV show?

4. What do you think is their proudest moment or greatest accomplishment?

5. Please name your teen's favorite restaurant.

6. What type of music do they like?

7. Who is your teen's favorite teacher?

8. If your teen could buy anything in the world what would it be?

9. What is your teen's least favorite subject in school? _____

10. What is your teen's greatest strength?

11. Please list an interesting thing about your teen that they think you don't know.

12. What really makes your teen angry?

13. What embarrasses your teen?

14. Would your teen know how to get home if lost and had no cell phone?

15. In what way are you like your teen?

16. In what way are you different from them?

How Well Do I Know My Parent/Caregiver?

For Teens

Tell Me About _____ (your parent/caregiver)

1. Who is their best friend?

9. When is their birthday?

2. What is their favorite color?

10. What is your parent's/caregiver's greatest strength?

3. What is their favorite TV show?

11. Please list an interesting thing about your parent/caregiver that they think you don't know.

4. What is their favorite type of food?

12. What really makes your parent/caregiver angry?

5. Please name their favorite restaurant.

13. What do you think makes your parent/caregiver happy?

6. What type of music do they listen to on the radio?

14. How would your parent/caregiver survive without a smart phone for a week?

7. In which state were they born?

15. In what way are you like your parent/caregiver?

8. If your parent/caregiver could buy anything in the world what would it be?

16. In what way are you different from them?



Final Thought

Parenting a teen is rewarding but it's also incredibly challenging. Asking for help doesn't mean you're failing. It means you care deeply and want to show up for your child in the best way you can. It takes strength to have hard conversations, to admit when things aren't working, and to try something new.

If you or your teen need more support, reach out. Lena Pope is here to walk alongside families through every season of life. You can also connect with a local mental health provider in your area. You're not alone and you don't have to do this alone.

OUR MISSION IS TO HELP **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN NORTH TEXAS THRIVE**, REGARDLESS OF INCOME OR INSURANCE STATUS.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP FURTHER THIS CAUSE, SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN HOW YOU CAN **GET INVOLVED**.



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