

KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING WITH YOUR TEEN/TWEEN—HAVING HARD CONVERSATIONS ON THEIR TERMS

Watch for “reasoning” or “arguing” with their perceptions because for them it is real and will just leave them feeling less understood.

- Be relational. Validate how important their friends are to them. Use your own relationship with them to win influence. “I am concerned...” versus an initial appeal to authority and rules.
- Be clear and consistent and explain reasons without trying to reason with them or get them to agree with you.
- Understand that adolescents will cycle through identities to find their place; this can be confusing and increase anxiety. Be a calm and welcoming presence to help them sort through it rather than giving advice. Avoid asking too many questions or putting them on the spot to have an immediate answer.
- Keep in check your own anxiety and fears. This signals to them that you do not trust their ability to explore which is what is needed for them to develop a cohesive identity. When you miss this, apologize and start over. Realize that supporting constructive ways to honor their autonomy and exploration may mean that they either accept more fully or reject some cultural and familial expectations.
- If concerned about content of exploration (drugs, etc) provide more opportunities for exploration in other areas. Instead of “don’t do drugs...do x, y, and z.” Let them come up for solutions with your help. Remember, potential for achievement are often predictive of and levels of self-esteem.
- Compliment their strengths to reinforce their self-esteem and to increase agency from a place of positivity and value. Hard conversations should include validating who they are, not what they are getting wrong or their incompetence.
- Find what works for your teen/tween to take in hard conversations or how to reconnect afterward.
 - a. Instead of asking lots of open-ended questions, share something about your day and be specific in asking them (i.e. What made you smile today?)
 - b. Walking or Hiking
 - c. Game Nights or Watching a TV show together
 - d. Shopping or Eating

Trust your parent intuition. If additional/professional support is needed, get it.

REFERENCES: *Therapy with Heart, The Couch & Beyond* (Jade Bruno), *Yee Psychological Services* (David Yee, for OCD and trauma), *Centre for Middle Ground* (Kara Fuentes, teen groups).