

Building Trust With Your Teen

By Marina Passalaris

The definition of trust is the firm belief in the reliability, truth or strength of someone or something. Trust is a two-way street. It is incredibly difficult to trust another person if they are not behaviourally or verbally reliable.

While your teen may trust that you will provide food, a home, education and clothes, it does not end there. Teens also need to trust that their parents will be available and react compassionately when they make a mistake. It is vital that parents spend quality time with their teens and not pass them over for work or other responsibilities. Teens need to have parents ask about what is going on in their life and be genuinely interested. They need parents to keep their word, a safe home without constant hostility; they also need parents to discipline behaviour that is out of hand and set up boundaries in the home environment. All these things demonstrate care and as a result build trust.

Many times, when teens do not get adequate attention from one or both parents, they misinterpret the behaviour as a lack of love. In order to regain some of that attention they will then engage in questionable behaviour that often elicits a response from mum or dad (or both). After all, any kind of attention can be better than no attention.

Tips to Strengthen Your Relationship with Your Teen

Trust is the major building block to any relationship. It solidifies the attachment between you and your child and it reduces rebellion. Show your teen that you are willing to trust them but also let them know that if they break this trust, there will be consequences.

Here are some simple tips to help improve the trust between you and your teen:

1. Communication is the key: Communication is an important step to many things and this includes building trust.
2. Be a person of your word: Many times both parents and teens will make promises and then cancel due to lack of time, making excuses. This is the easiest way to reduce trust in each other. Teens and parents need to honour their word to each other.
3. Respect each other: Treating each other and speaking to each other (and about each other) with respect is important to building trust. It is difficult to develop a trusting relationship if you're spoken to (or of) disrespectfully.
4. Patience: Building a trusting relationship happens over time. At times you may feel like your relationship is progressing and at other times you may feel it is disintegrating. During these times, it is important you keep positive and hopeful and continue to invest time and effort in building a trusting relationship.
5. Consistency: For a trusting relationship to develop there must be consistency (or reliability) in the relationship. The more often each of you demonstrates that you can be trusted, the more likely you will be trusted.
6. Make time as a family: Eating dinner together as a family several times a week creates a sense of togetherness. Communication during dinner is important.
7. Unconditional love: Showing unconditional love to your teen even when they have made a really bad choice heals their feelings and empowers their self-esteem.