

What can you do when your teen pushes you away?

During the teenage years children tend to try to separate themselves from their parents' influence in an attempt to assert their autonomy. In doing so you may feel your teen is pushing you away or withholding information about their lives (e.g. friends, what they are doing, where they are). As a result you may feel that you do not know your child as well as you would like and that you do not have much influence on their choices. Below is a list of common reasons why teens decide not to share things with their parents.

Triggers Causing Teens to Push Away		
Parent Behavior	Teen's Reaction	Alternative Parent Behavior
You are in a Bad Mood . You have had a long day at work and are tired and irritable.	There is no point in talking. I hate when my parents yell.	Take time to take care of yourself. Once you are in a better headspace provide emotional support to your teen.
You are not completely paying attention because you are Preoccupied with other things such as chores.	Are you even listening to me? I am not a priority or important to my parents.	Stop what you are doing for a moment if your child decides to talk about something important to them. Set aside some time (e.g. after dinner) to spend quality alone time with your teen.
You don't like talking about certain things like dating or sex so you Avoid Topics .	My parents are uncomfortable with these topics so it's best to avoid them and talk to my friends instead. My parents don't accept me for who I am.	Identify the topics you feel uncomfortable talking about, seek ways to talk about these topics with your teen, and then initiate the conversation with your teen.
You sense your child is not telling you something so you Persistently Question Them about what is bothering them.	Please leave me alone! You are so annoying! You are making me feel worse!	Recognize that your teen is emotionally upset and back off so they can try to use their own strategies to cope. Ask less direct/intrusive questions (e.g. how are things going with your friends?).
You Tease your teen in an attempt to get them to laugh or lighten up.	My parents don't take me or my feelings seriously. My parents think my problems are silly. My parents don't like who I am.	Take your teen seriously, even when they feel or react more extremely than makes sense to you. Share your own daily experiences or childhood memories to help put the situation in perspective.
You Nag your child to do their chores or change their behaviors.	You are so annoying! I am going to do it when and how I want, which is not now because you are telling me to do it.	Be clear about your request the first time and follow through with a consequence if the chore is not completed. If the behavior continues, ask what is getting in the way of your teen doing the chores and negotiate a solution.
You Express Disapproval of other teens or your own teen.	I can't talk about that with my mom, she wouldn't understand or approve.	Appreciate that your teen is sharing this with you, ask them to explain their side of the topic, and tentatively express your anxieties (not disapproval).
You let it show that you Doubt or Mistrust Them .	My parents think I am still a kid. My parents think I am a bad kid.	Trust that your teen will make good choices and has the skills to solve their own problems.
You Interrupt them when they are talking.	She doesn't care about what I have to say so why bother trying!?!	Monitor how often you interrupt and apologize when you do.
You Jump to Conclusions or Take Sides when your teen has had a disagreement with a	Why try to explain, she only listens to the teacher's side not mine.	Listen attentively, wait until the end, calmly ask questions and discuss both viewpoints.

peer or adult.

You **Don't Keep Secrets**.

If I tell my mom or dad the entire family/world will know!

Keep certain information confidential.

When your teen comes to you for help with a problem you **Punish** them.

I need help with this, but if I go to my parents it will only make things worse!

Don't dwell upon the mistake or what your child did wrong, focus on how they can avoid similar situations in the future, or fix the problem now.

You **Lecture** your child, giving long speeches on issues important to you.

I know, I know! You have told me before! What I think doesn't matter.

Deal with problems through dialogue. Ask your child to talk about their perspective.

In summary, the parenting strategies that teens describe as effective in encouraging them to open up and share with their parents include listening attentively, showing emotional support, expressing an understanding of their feelings and experiences, honoring their secrets, showing appreciation for who they are becoming, and taking time to have fun with them.

Try to keep in mind that your child's attempts to reduce your influence is an important stage in the development of their identity and the establishment of a healthy self-esteem. Rest assured that studies find that in early adulthood youth's values and behaviors end up more like their parents than the friends they had as teenagers.

Reference:

Tokic, A. & Pecnik, N. (2010). Parental behaviors related to adolescents' self-disclosure: Adolescent's views. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28 (2), 201-222.

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