Parents Matter:
Building Strong Parent-Teen Relationships Through Effective Communication
Background

Many parents and teens have a strong bond and communicate effectively, but parents often underestimate how much they matter in the lives of their teens. The Center for Parent and Teen Communication at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia partnered with YouGov to conduct focus groups and survey a national sample of parents and their 13–17 year old teens about their relationship quality and communication.

And some of the results may surprise you!

Credits

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Parents and teens DO love each other.

Despite the constant battles depicted in pop culture or alarming headlines about “surviving the teen years,” both parents and teens report strong feelings of love, mutual respect, and good communication.
• 97% of parents and 95% of teens say they love each other

• 94% of parents and 93% of teens say they have a good relationship

• 96% of parents look forward to hopefully, having a strong relationship with their teen as they grow into adulthood; 94% of teens say the same
Parents matter more than they think...

...but parents are likely underestimating their influence.

- Only 50% strongly agree that they matter as much to their teens as they did when their children were young.
- Part of that perception could be a result of undervaluing their role in their teens’ lives.
- While 78% of parents say their teens value their guidance, 92% of teens say they want their parents’ support in making good decisions.
Why do parents think they don’t matter?

Many struggle with feelings of being pushed away by their teens, and others buy into the harmful myth that teens are wired for risk and therefore don’t need or want their guidance.

71% of parents falsely believe teens think they are invincible and wired to take risks. But parents and caring adults matter in the lives of young people. Tweens and teens crave their guidance and support.
Parents and teens can communicate effectively, but still experience some pain points.

Overall, 79% of parents and 82% of teens feel satisfied with how they communicate with each other.

But our focus group research identified a few areas of conflict:

Teens reported a lack of understanding due to generational differences, fear of lectures and scolding, arguments over privacy and boundaries, a desire for more independence, and parents buying into negative stereotypes about teens as some of the more challenging aspects of their relationship with their parents.

Parents said a common challenge in communicating with their teen is frequently encountering a "know-it-all" attitude, noting that teens are sometimes dismissive of their parents' advice or guidance. One parent said, “My 14-year-old son thinks he knows more than I do now,” and several others added, “They think they know everything.”

However, parents also recognize this is a way teens try to establish their independence – a key developmental milestone of adolescence...

“...independence is a very positive thing. I think it helps them to get along and to be more out in the world or to be able to perform better outside of the house.” – Focus group parent
Teens benefit from hearing about parents’ childhood experiences.

87% of parents acknowledged that things were different when they grew up compared to today, but 72% of teens say they benefitted from hearing about their parents’ teenage experiences. And “sharing their own experiences” was the #1 strategy that parents believe can help open lines of communication with their teen (71%).
Activities improve parent-teen communications.

Parents and teens also favor communicating while engaged in other activities. When asked what strategies make communication easier, 67% of teens said this was their top recommendation. It was the second-most popular response from parents (64%).
5 tips for improving communication

Teens want their parents’ involvement in their lives and appreciate their guidance. Be a sounding board for your teen. This means you listen more than you talk and are present to guide your teen (when asked!) as they work through their thoughts, feelings, and decisions. Here are five tips to help parents keep lines of communication open with their teens.

1. Talk while doing something else.
Take a walk, go for a drive, play catch, or cook together. These are just a few ways parents and teens can make it easier to talk to one another.

“Simply just spend more time with them. Like I strengthen my relationship with my parents just by living life, right? Like maybe on the weekends we all go grocery shopping together or something. Just running errands together. Maybe the car doesn’t have gas, so we go get that together. Just simple tasks together.”
- Focus group teen
Share your own experiences.
Many parents and teens reported that sharing their experiences made communicating easier. Be open and honest about your feelings, beliefs, and how your experiences inform the way you think. Don’t pretend you know everything or what’s best for every situation. Create a respectful dialogue where you genuinely listen to each other.
Create time and space for conversations.

Sometimes, we must be intentional about setting a time and place for a conversation. This may be especially helpful for talks about important topics or when busy schedules interfere with spending quality time together. Make time in your schedule to spend time together as a family and chat.
4 Minimize distractions.

Put your phone on silent mode (or put it away entirely), close your laptop or tablet, turn off the TV, and focus on spending quality time with one another. Try to be fully present during conversations, rather than letting your mind wander and thinking about your to-do list.
Nearly 1 in 3 teens say texting makes communication easier. Sometimes, sending a text lets us to collect our thoughts and clearly say what we mean. It can also be a quick and easy way to share a loving and supportive message.

5 tips for improving communication

Communicate by text.
YouGov Methods

The recruitment survey for the focus groups was fielded to YouGov’s proprietary panel of US respondents. This survey ascertained whether respondents were eligible to participate in the study, explained the nature of the study, obtained consent from participants, and collected information on respondents’ availability to participate in focus groups. Based on the availability of respondents who indicated their interest in participating, invitations were sent out to panelists for one of several scheduled focus groups. The focus groups were led by senior YouGov staff members, using a discussion guide developed by CPTC. All focus groups were hosted on Zoom, and were recorded. Following each event, the video recordings were professionally transcribed. At the conclusion of all focus groups, YouGov delivered transcripts and notes from all sessions. YouGov staff members also met with stakeholders at CPTC to debrief and discuss key findings and recommendations for the quantitative survey fielded subsequently.

For the quantitative survey, YouGov interviewed 507 respondents, who were then matched down to a sample of 500 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the November 2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) 1-year sample, with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file). The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The weights were then post-stratified on region, gender, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (3-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

For more information on YouGov’s privacy protocols, data security, and data storage, please see their Compliance FAQ.