



CENTER FOR PARENT & TEEN
COMMUNICATION

Scripts For Parents

Conversations with teens can be improved when we adjust our communication based on understanding what is happening in the teen brain. The examples below take into consideration that the entire teen brain is rapidly developing. The emotional centers are particularly well developed while the reasoning centers are developing a bit slower. Stress activates those well-developed emotional centers causing them to overpower the part of the brain needed for thoughtful decision-making and planning.

HOMEWORK

Say this...

"You worked so hard this semester and I'd hate for one missed assignment to mess up your chances to make the honor roll. What's your plan for getting this assignment done on time?"

...not this

"You need to finish your homework right now because if you don't you'll get a bad grade, then you'll miss the honor roll, and I don't even want to think about what that means for how you're getting into college!"

Why?

Teen brains react to emotions first and explanations second. Teens will grasp a parents' anger and disappointment during a lecture, which stresses them out. A stressed out brain cannot easily process information and struggles to understand the intended message.

STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Say this...

"Are you okay? It upsets me that you had to break up a fight at school. I need a bit of space and time to think this through. I'll get back to you. We'll get through this together."

...not this

"It doesn't matter that you tried to break up the fight at school today! You could've been hurt or suspended! This is serious!"

Why?

All brains work best under cool, calm conditions. Teens are better able to process information and learn while calm. Unless safety is a concern, parents should take time to compose themselves so they can have a calm discussion.

RULES & BOUNDARIES

Say this...

"We ask you to stay home on weeknights so we can all get enough sleep and be prepared for work and school tomorrow. Maybe things will be different when school is out for the summer. We can discuss it then. Does that make sense?"

...not this

"My house, my rules. You can't go out on a school night with your friends and that's final. This isn't up for debate."

Why?

Young people are developing their reasoning muscles and respond well to explanations especially when they reinforce that parents care about them. When they feel like rules are about controlling them it activates their emotional centers. Their frustration may prevent them from benefiting from the intended guidance. Because teen brains' reward centers encourage time with peers, rules that keep them away from friends may stir particular frustration and will be rejected unless the teen is calmly offered an explanation that is rooted in their well-being.

Established in 2017, **Center for Parent and Teen Communication** is a multidisciplinary team based within the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Center for Parent and Teen Communication offers practical, science-based strategies for strengthening family connections and building youth prepared to thrive. For additional resources, visit parentandteen.com. For media inquiries contact Eden Pontz (pontze@chop.edu).