

One of the most common problems that parents and teens experience is a gulf in understanding. The proverbial "ships passing in the night" or "speaking totally different languages" are common descriptions of teen-parent communications. It often happens that both a parent and a teen are experiencing the same sorts of feelings and frustrations without ever letting the other know it. Completing this worksheet together can be a first step toward better communication.

To help you to re-establish and improve communication, complete the following worksheet separately, then ask your parent or teen to complete and share their responses.

Check off as many of the following words that describe a typical conversation or how you feel when you are talking with your teen or parent.

comfortable	frustrating	not heard	angry
understood	used up	annoying	exciting
impatient	sincere	stimulating	edited
loud	gentle	clear	confusing
frequent	seldom	happy	meaningless
sensible	pointless	meaningful	despairing
endless	open	warm	boring
hopeful	optimistic	embarrassing	uplifting
non-existent	respectful	muddled	tense
controlling	considerate	uncomfortable	predictable
depressing	spiritual	hurried	draining
speaking different languages	enjoyable	anxious	repetitive

Now, answer the following questions in a phrase or two:

- How often do you feel you have [or had] the same conversation?
- Do you feel as though you can predict exactly where each conversation is going?
- What do you usually talk about with your teen or parent?
- What was the last meaningful conversation you had? How did it end?
- When you are having a conversation with your teen or parent, what do you appreciate most about it?
- When you are having a conversation with your teen or parent, what do you dislike most about it?
- Are there things you would like to discuss with your teen or parent but feel you can't? If your answer is yes, why not?

Check off the following statements that apply to your relationship and/or communication with your teen or parent:

- I know he/she really understands and cares about me and my thoughts and feelings.
- I know he/she really understands and cares about me and my thoughts and feelings, but ...
- He/she doesn't understand how I feel.
- He/she wants to understand, but just can't.
- He/she just rambles on and on and on.
- It never even makes any sense.
- I've heard it all a million times before.
- Isn't he/she ever going to get it?
- I'm tired of taking all the blame/responsibility.
- Why is he/she making this so difficult?
- I never know how we get to the place we get to.
- I just want it to be over.
- She/he is always lecturing me.
- I've heard all this before.
- I don't believe a word.
- I don't even bother to listen.
- I appreciate his/her point of view, but ...
- That's just the way adults/teens talk.
- I want to believe, but ...
- I don't feel I'm being heard

Describe your experience of a good conversation. A bad conversation.

How do you feel about your parent's or teen's side of the conversation?

Exchange your questionnaires and use each other's responses to begin a conversation about your communication. This exercise will work best if each person agrees to listen closely to what is being said with an open mind and without interrupting. You may also want to establish some ground rules for your conversation such as speaking about yourself before speaking about your teen or parent and no criticizing or blaming.

Reflections for Better Communications

- It's natural to have preconceived ideas about the world, ourselves, and those

we love and our interactions with them. If you are able to place imaginary "brackets" around those preconceptions and set them aside before you have a conversation with your teen or your parent, you may be surprised at what you discover.

- Each person shares equal responsibility or blame when communication is difficult or isn't working.
 - Remember the old adage: "Try walking around in the other person's shoes for a day." Try looking at the world from your parent's or teen's perspective.
 - It's easier to say that the other person doesn't or can't understand than to work to understand the other person.
 - Do you ever feel that your teen or parent is trying to confuse or manipulate you? If so, what does that mean?
 - Who is more frustrated when someone doesn't "get it" or understand what is being said -- the speaker or the listener?
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