5 Relationship Building Exercises for Teens and Parents

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Does your teen seem difficult to reach? These exercises can help strengthen your relationship.

Build a Better Relationship with Your Teen

Adolescence is a challenging time for teens as they continue to develop physically, mentally, and emotionally. Often when children move into adolescence, their relationship with their parents becomes more distant, and sometimes parents are at loss as to how to strengthen their bond with their teens.

- **Parent perspective:** Teens can appear to be withdrawn, disrespectful, selfish, and out of control. They don't seem as open or talkative as they were when they were younger, and it can feel difficult to understand what's driving their behavior.

- **Teen perspective:** Parents can seem insensitive and invasive. Teens often feel that their parents do not understand them and do not know what they are feeling or going through at this stage of their life. They feel misunderstood and sometimes act out in frustration.

These five simple relationship building exercises can help improve and strengthen the bond between parents and teens. Sharing experiences and quality time together can improve the connection you have to each other. Many of these exercises can be modified to accommodate younger children, as well.

Find a time when your teen isn't busy with other activities.

1. **Likes and Dislikes: Communication Building**

Many researchers agree that open communication is a significant factor in forming a positive and healthy relationship between parents and teens. This first exercise can help build communication because it allows parent and teen to practice effective communication skills and active listening.

**Instructions**
1. Sit down with your teen in a quiet place where there will be no interruptions.
2. Each participant needs a pen and a piece of paper.
3. Write down three things you like about the other person on your piece of paper—and also write three things you would change.
4. After you both are done, take the time to agree that you will both try your best to listen when the other person is talking, without interruptions, and that you will give the other person your undivided attention. Also agree that you both will do your best to react respectfully in the discussion without becoming defensive, angry, or judgmental. Remember: this is an exercise to strengthen communication skills.
5. Take turns discussing what you each wrote down.

2. **Blindfolded Walk: Trust Building**

Trust is one of the fundamental building blocks to a strong interpersonal relationship. It is important to remember that trust may build slowly and it also can be broken down easily. Trust is a two-way street. This next exercise involves building trust.

**Instructions**
1. Blindfold one person, making sure the person cannot see at all.
2. Have the person who is not blindfolded walk the blindfolded person around the house, guiding him/her for approximately 10–15 minutes.
3. After, have a discussion about the experience and how it felt to be guided around the house with no sight and have to completely trust the other person.
4. Switch roles and repeat so that the other person can experience guiding or being guided.

3. **Poetry and Memory: Appreciating Perspectives**

Often, it is hard to communicate about an event that has occurred—especially if it is negative—because we may not feel the other person understands or is listening wholeheartedly without judgment. This is a writing exercise that involves examining an event or situation that has occurred between parent and teen. The event could be either positive or negative.

**Instructions**
1. Sit down in a quiet place with paper and pens.
2. Without looking at each other’s work, write a six-sentence poem reflecting how you feel about a particular situation or event that involves both parties.
3. Read your poem out loud to the other person.
4. Have the other person try to guess what situation the poem is reflecting.
5. Discuss your feeling with the other person and the impact the situation had on you.
6. Take turns doing this poem exercise.
4. Art Director: Listening Skills

Supportive listening skills are essential for interpersonal communication. Learning how to be an effective listener can help strengthen relationships, assist in resolving conflict, and offer constructive support to those who need it. Take the time as a parent to teach your teens what active, supportive listening looks like.

Instructions

1. Sit back to back with your teen on a comfortable floor. You may wish to use cushions or other supportive aids for comfort.
2. With paper and pencils in hand, have one person explain, one step at a time, how to draw something. This could be a face, a landscape, a series of shapes, etc.
3. Afterward, face each other and examine each other's drawings.
4. Have a discussion on the exercise.

Note: This exercise could be altered to accommodate other media such as paint, clay, or even building blocks or legos. This exercise can also work with Jenga blocks.

Of course you know each other . . . but could you know each other better?

5. Favorites: Getting to Know You

Although parents with teens most likely live and interact with each other daily, how well do they really know each other's likes and dislikes? This is a writing exercise that allows parents and teens to know each other's favorites.

Instructions

1. Sit in a quiet, comfortable place.
2. With pen and paper in hand, and without looking at the other person’s work, write a list of your favorite color, number, movie, TV show, book, subject in school, food, drink, friend, and things to do.
3. Take turns guessing each other’s answers.
4. Conclude with a discussion on the activity and what you learned from each other.