

The Importance of PARENT/CHILD COMMUNICATION

Perhaps the only thing more difficult than being a teenager is parenting one. The adolescent years bring turmoil from increasing hormones, seeking independence, and growing friendships. Steering a teenager through these years can be difficult. Ingraining your child with your values, ideas, and beliefs can take a toll on both of you. It is important to establish a connection with your child from his/her level. Understand where he/she is coming from. Remember what you did and thought when you were in his/her shoes. Share those experiences.

For many parents and their children, the idea of talking about sensitive subjects such as dating, sexuality, drugs, or violence can be uncomfortable. Talking with your child can be a delicate process at times. Research has shown that the adolescent brain truly is different than the adult or child brain. Youth in adolescence are going through many physical changes, including changes in their brain. Therefore, while you and

your child may not see eye to eye, the truth is that they are going through some amazing changes that cause them to think differently, yet at the same time creating a perfect window of opportunity for them to develop critical and creative thinking skills. This is one more reason why it is important to talk with your child as often as possible.

While talking with your child is important, it is not always easy. Many parents and caregivers get frustrated when they ask their kids questions such as "What did you do in school today" or "How was your day" and they receive replies such as "I don't know" or other responses such as grunts or two word answers. Some suggestions on how to navigate these responses include avoiding standard questions and being more specific, such as: "How was your math class today? I know you've been complaining about it lately." Take time to listen to your child's responses. When you listen to your child, be sure to put time and energy into listening. Research suggests that

if you are willing to wait at least three seconds after asking a question, your child is more likely to respond. In addition, make sure you make eye contact while talking and listening and verbally respond to your child's comments.

The Peers Encouraging Abstinent Kids (PEAK) Program encourages parent/child communication. Parents often worry that if they talk to their children about sex, it will encourage them to participate in sexual activities. The reality is that talking with your child will make it easier for him/her to postpone sexual involvement. Share your values and beliefs. Stay involved in your child's life. Always keep the doorway to communication open!

For more information on parent/child communication or the PEAK Program, contact Brittany Baeumel, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coordinator, Panhandle Health District, 208-415-5143 or bbaeumel@phd1.idaho.gov.



PARENTS MATTER.

*Talk to your kids...
They're listening.*

