

The Tools of Talk – Parent-Adolescent Communication

The way parents talk, listen and respond to their adolescents affects the way disagreements, conflict and issues are dealt with. Open, sincere and equal communication creates healthier relationships, builds closeness and assists in effectively negotiating important issues arising during adolescence.

Effective communication begins with paying attention, being real and available. It is important to convey to your adolescent that, at that moment, they are the most important thing to you and you are interested in what they have to say. This means not interrupting them, listening closely and encouraging young people to talk rather than talking yourself.

Being prepared to negotiate, change and be flexible in your communication style is also important. This conveys understanding, acceptance and helps build a healthy level of respect within your relationship. It is ok for you to have different views from your adolescent and disagree. In fact it's normal. Acknowledge these differences, enquire more about them, and be accepting of your adolescent's point of view. Asking your adolescent's opinion or questioning them about something they know a lot about, will convey a sense of importance and interest in what they have to say.

Using "I- sentences", (ie. "I would appreciate it if you...") when you are trying to share a point, helps personalize communication, conveys responsibility for how you feel and avoids language that labels and blames (ie. "You should...", "Why don't you..."). This will help create understanding from each other's perspectives.

Be open and honest in conversations with young people. Share your thoughts, feelings and experiences with them – good or bad – as this will help them respond in a similar way to you.

Remember communication is more than just talking – it also involves body language, voice tone, facial expressions, gestures and behaviours – and these can be powerful ways of conveying messages. Young people need to be communicated with in different ways, in a variety of settings – so be creative!

Kingston Youth Services are running Parenting Programs in 2008 – please call 1300 36 94 36 and speak to Rebecca for more information