



## How to Listen

Remember: the best way to find out what is going on with your child is to, well, find out what's going on with him. Lecturing won't get you there. A back-and-forth conversation could. Just talking to your child is only half the job. You can keep the lines of communication open by knowing how to listen and when to talk.

### Here are some topics and hints to get your teen talking:

1. **Create a safe environment for your child** to share the truth. Assure your child that he can always be honest with you – without fear of ridicule or blame.
2. **Don't answer the phone or allow other interruptions** while you're talking to your teen.
3. **Listen to your child vent.** Sometimes she just needs to complain and get things off her chest.
4. **Rephrase your teen's comments to show him you've heard what he's saying** or give nonverbal support and encouragement by nodding and smiling.
5. **Be attentive for topics that lead into drugs or alcohol** (Example: perhaps your teen describes someone at school who is "always high" or mentions a celebrity who has gone to rehab). Ask your teen what he thinks about those people or their behavior.
6. **Focus completely on your child** and try to see things from your child's point of view. This will help you sympathize with his/her situation.
7. **Be aware that your child could be hiding his true feelings** out of fear, embarrassment, or something else, and you should be careful to not just take what the child says at face value.
8. **Listen between the words.** Pay attention to body language, facial expressions, difficulty finding the right words to use, etc.
9. **Recognize and confess when you don't have the energy to be a good listener** and agree to restart the conversation (as long as it isn't dire) at a later, better time.