

Heart Heart **PARENTS**

Simple Listen & Learn Conversation Starters to Build Trust with Teens

Step 1: Open Ended Questions and Interview By Comment

If you want your teen to hear you, you must invest the time and energy to hear them.

Your teen is a growing, independent soul and social actor from you as parent. Sometimes parents can become so worried about their teens that they forget that they are separate individuals who process the world differently, because they are in a different stage of life and have a different social location than their parents.

Building a better, more satisfying relationship with your teen first means you must listen as non-judgmentally as possible. This will require that you remember your teen is their own person. The first step is to get to know your teen in a different way. Sociologists and journalists use an interview technique called open ended questions. Inside of interview conversations, interviewers use, *interview by comment*. Both of these techniques may be helpful to parents to learn more about how their teen is processing and coping with the world.

The following are a few open ended questions you can use to start conversations. Remember the purpose of this exercise is to simply listen and learn. Be careful not to jump into advice giving mode, simply listen and learn.

Open Ended Questions and Interview by Comment Questions As Conversation Starters

Open ended questions, don't direct the person being interviewed to answer any specific way. Open ended questions are phrased in a way to require more than a yes or no answer. Each question is about a specific area of teen life and has a sample follow up question. As you practice open ended question, listen and learn conversation starters you will come up with your own natural follow up questions.

Social Life

1.) Who do you consider to be your best friend right now?

1a.) What do you like best about _____ (name the best friend)?

1b.) Do you hang out with _____ at lunch?

School

2.) Tell me about your favorite class today? Or, 3.) Tell me about your least favorite class?

Tip: This is not a conversation about homework or grades. Teens are more likely to respond to coaching about homework if they believe you are interested in how they feel about school.

Leisure Time or Hobbies

4.) What do you like to do on weekends when you have alone time?

4a.) Is there something you would like to do with your friends that you don't have time or money to do?

5.) Who is your favorite artist, singer or band right now?

5a.) What do you like about them? This may lead to an invitation to listen to music.

Tip: Don't by pass this opportunity. You really earn credibility as being interested in their world. Go ahead! You can do it! Trips with my daughter have become mutual, musical education opportunities. We listen to one of her songs and then we listen to one of mine. She even attended a concert with me. Now, I have to return the favor.

Family

6.) What would you like to do with the family this weekend?

6a.) What bugs you the most about your little sister?

Tip: Be prepared for the answer without jumping into advice giving. This is the perfect opportunity to compliment your teen's sibling relationship. You may want to say something like this, "Thank you for not yelling the other day when Ashley went into your room without permission."

Personal Development, Health or Spirituality

7.) I have been trying to meditate, how do you best re-charge your batteries after a stressful day at school these days?

8.) I have been working on eating more vegetables, do you have a health goal to share?

Step #2) Try Asking Your Teen Open Ended Questions

If it feels awkward, try again. Then next time you are alone together, try again.

Relationship building is hard work and it takes practice over time.

Tip: Ask these questions casually. Teens might feel put on the spot if they feel interrogated or think they will get in trouble for their answers. One *Heart2Heart Mom* shared that she has these conversations in the car when traveling together to a school or after-school activity. When teens are not required to have eye contact they don't feel interrogated or threatened by open ended questions.

Parenting Exercise: Have one non-judgmental conversation with your teen a day. (Remember to listen and learn – don't give advice.)