

1. LISTEN.

Pay close attention to what your teen says. Teenagers often communicate much more than what they may seem to be saying on the surface. Read between the lines and pay attention to tone and body language.

2. Create little rituals to connect.

Maybe you always give a hug along with the car keys. Or you always go for pizza together on Sunday night. Or you get your nails done with your daughter. Find things that work, and make them happen regularly. Your teen will come to expect and rely on those moments of connection.

3. Be their sounding board.

If you're a good listener, your teen will share his or her problems. Your teen doesn't want you to step in and solve problems – that makes her feel incompetent, and dependent, so she needs to push you away. What she wants is for you to listen, and ask a few good questions, so she can sort out how she feels and think about the best solutions. She'll leave that conversation feeling closer to you.

4. Commiserate with how oppressive homework can feel.

It makes it a little easier if someone at least appreciates that they worked at school all day and now they have to work all evening on homework. Offer to help edit your teen's essay or review their math homework. And bringing tea or a snack will melt your teen's heart.

5. Ask your teen how their day was, every day.

Teens can be guarded, but simply asking how the school day or a club meeting went will help them realize that you're actually interested in their day to day experience, not just their grades and achievements. Be specific in your questions to encourage real answers:

-“How did the other kids in the club respond to your idea about...”

-“Who do you usually have lunch with these days?”

6. Hug them every day.

No matter how old you are, everyone needs regular attention and love from those they love. Giving your teen a hug and saying “I love you,” is one of the easiest ways to stay connected.

7. If they don't want hugs, give foot massages.

Who can turn down a foot massage? And it's a great chance to chat.

8. Show up to their events.

After-school activities are often a large part of a teen's life, so taking an interest in their preferred hobby is a great way to connect. Make time in your schedule to go to a game or play and enjoy sharing in your teen's talents. But remember, you're not there to help them get better at their activity; that will be perceived as a criticism, and they'll dread riding home with you. You're there to appreciate! Just say "I love to watch you play!"

9. If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.

Your teen isn't perfect. He or she will make a lot of mistakes. But the more you comment on them, the more your teen feels like you don't love them, even if you say you do. Sometimes you do have to make suggestions for improvement, but you can do those positively. In other words, look for what your teen is doing right, at that moment. Which is more likely to motivate your teen toward cooperation and affection? "Thanks so much for bringing the dirty dishes down from your room with only one reminder. I really appreciate it," or "So you finally brought those dirty dishes down from your room... I don't know how you can live in that pigsty!" Give credit for every step in the right direction.

10. Text your teen.

Sure, you could call. But it's embarrassing to pick up the phone in front of his friends and talk to his mom. If you text, you stay connected, and he doesn't have to admit who he's texting with.

11. Going on a car trip together?

Let your teen be the DJ! Teens are developing their tastes and many times the books, movies and music they enjoy are a big part of their emerging identity. Let your teen choose the playlist. Even if you don't particularly enjoy the music, their taste in tunes is a telling window into their thoughts and emotions. At the very least, it gives you something to talk about.

12. Create a family book club.

Buy two copies of a novel both you and your teen may enjoy. Find a fun place (over brunch?) to talk about what you're reading. What do you think of the characters' choices? Would they make the same choice? Did they see that plot turn coming? For busy high schoolers, you might offer to read (or maybe re-read) the literature they have been assigned for English class.

13. Offer to host a dinner party for your teen and a few of their friends

...but involve them in the planning of the menu and the cooking. This is a great way to not only teach your teen how to make simple dishes which will be helpful as they move out on their own, but also make them feel grown up, and that you have an interest in getting to know their friends as emerging adults.

14. Let them bring a friend along on family outings or vacations.

As we reached our mid to late teens my parents regularly offered to include one of our friends on outings. While this may seem like a distraction from "family time" it actually made me feel like my parents cared about letting us have a good time and wanted to get to know our friends. Often, it makes for more interesting discussions.

15. Work out together.

If your teen is into working out, ask if you can join her. If your teen unwinds by shooting hoops in the back yard, go out and join in, even if you haven't played basketball in years.

16. Watch movies or a weekly TV show together.

Get the popcorn popped and enjoy some down time with your teen. Let them choose the movie rental or Netflix flick. Don't try to make this a regular Friday night thing, or your teen will feel like you're trying to keep them from social events. A Sunday night movie time when your teen can relax before the upcoming school week and after doing a lot of homework would be ideal.

17. Do chores WITH your teen as a way to bond.

Teens don't always necessarily recognize the time and work that goes into maintaining a household. I know I certainly didn't understand how difficult it was until I moved out on my own. Saying something like, "Wow, we've both had really long days, if we work together to do these dishes it will go so much faster and we can both relax sooner," is a great equalizer. The more you demand they do things, or have a negative attitude, the more likely your teen will resist.

18. Try something new together.

Sharing in a new experience with your teen is a fantastic equalizer.

19. Have fun together.

It's essential that you and your teen find ways to enjoy each other's company. Since your teen won't necessarily think what you want to do is fun, that means you'll have to pay attention to what they think is fun and join them. Having fun together makes it more likely that your teen will want to talk to you.

20. Ask your teen to teach you something.

Teens want to be more mature. What could be more grown-up than teaching your parents something? You'd be surprised how much your teen knows that you don't know. Sure, much of it relates to electronics or social media. But she's likely to be learning things at school that you'd find fascinating, so you might also let her tell you what she's just learned about Hemingway, or the Roman Empire.

21. Go camping.

Away from screens and cell service, where you can hike and chat.

22. Buy tickets to go to a game together.

Whether your team wins or loses, cheering together brings you closer. And sitting in the bleachers together feels special and gives you a lot of time to talk.

23. Volunteer together.

Teens want to make the world a better place, and they want to see that they can make a difference. It will mean a lot to see that you share that commitment.

24. Ask if they'll be your friend on social media.

You'll have to promise not to comment on things, but you're allowed to "like" what they post occasionally. It's a great window into their world, especially if you don't over-react to what you see there.

25. Don't compare them to their siblings/cousins/friends.

I hated when my parents or teachers would talk about my siblings, whether it was in relation to my accomplishments or my shortcomings. This is a sure way to alienate and frustrate your teen. Teens want to feel like individuals with special and unique qualities that you recognize and appreciate regardless of how good their brother is at basketball or the perfect grades their best friend gets.

26. Let them have their freedom.

Unless you have a real reason, there is no need to helicopter parent your teen. In fact, making your own mistakes is a huge part of growing up. I'm certainly not suggesting letting your teen sneak into bars, but it's a normal part of teenage life for them to go to a party or on a date. Worried? First, calm yourself. Then, tell your teen that you know you are over-worried, but you need a little reassurance from them. Sit down and ask some questions about their plans, to be sure your concerns are met. ("Will there be adult supervision? What will you do if other kids are drinking or smoking marijuana? What will you do if you feel like you're in over your head and you want me to pick you up, no punishment no matter what?")

27. Talk to your teen about dating and sex.

Parents should realize that teens today are learning about and experimenting with their sexuality earlier and earlier. Instead of pulling out the chastity belt or locking them in their bedroom, have a conversation about dating, and yes -- safe sex. Ask to meet their boy/girl friend as early as they are comfortable introducing them to you (Some are just crushes and you don't necessarily need to meet them). The more you pretend it's not happening, the more likely it is your teen will engage in bad relationship and sex habits that could have serious repercussions in their future romantic lives. (See this article on 8 Convos to have with your teen before college for more info on how to talk with your teen about sex and other topics.)

28. Forget traditional discipline.

Instead, use "misbehavior" or poor judgment as an opportunity to get closer to your teen and help him develop good judgment. My parents never really grounded me and if they tried it was usually kind of a joke between my siblings and me -- It just isn't a very effective discipline method. Whenever I made mistakes or messed up, my parents would talk with me about what was going on, and that really helped me get my act together. Most of the time when a teen acts out it's because like any person they are going through an emotional upheaval. Getting to the root of the issue and then helping them problem-solve how to deal with their emotions better will go much further than locking the door and throwing away the key.

29. Remind them how special they are.

You don't need to shower your teen with compliments but occasionally reminding them how proud you are of their unique personality will always bolster their self-esteem. Avoid only praising big accomplishments, take notice of when they're working really hard on something even if they're struggling, and commend their effort and perseverance.

30. Practice unconditional love, no matter what.

There's plenty you can do to build a healthy and trusting relationship with your teen, but every person's journey is different. Since you can't plan your teen's life for them and no teen will always find that life is smooth sailing, remember that supporting your teen unconditionally no matter the mistakes they make is your number one goal as a parent. My parents just sent their fifth and final teen to college this fall; they've seen countless accomplishments and stumbles throughout from myself and each of my siblings, but they have proved their home and hearts are perpetually open.

"When you plant lettuce, if it does not grow well, you don't blame the lettuce. You look for reasons it is not doing well. It may need fertilizer, or more water, or less sun. You never blame the lettuce. Yet if we have problems with our friends or family, we blame the other person. But if we know how to take care of them, they will grow well, like the lettuce. Blaming has no positive effect at all, nor does trying to persuade using reason and argument. That is my experience. No blame, no reasoning, no argument, just understanding. If you understand, and you show that you understand, you can love, and the situation will change"

-Thich Nhat Hanh