

## Parenting

# How to have difficult conversations with teenagers.

Difficult conversations can include any topic that might be embarrassing, upsetting or controversial for either you or your child. It could even cause an argument or a conflict between you.

But difficult conversations can give you the chance to guide your child towards sensible and responsible decisions and to talk about your family values.

Being prepared can help you feel more confident and comfortable

### Conversations about alcohol and other drugs

There are no scripts for difficult conversations and tricky topics. But it's a good idea to think about these topics before your child asks.

For example, early conversations about things like being offered drugs at a party can help keep your child safe.

If you work out a few key points about drugs, alcohol, parties, etc. beforehand – and even practice them – you might not be caught so off guard when your child asks a tricky question while you're driving!

Make sure you have information from a reliable source, such as the Alcohol and Drug Foundation's Drug Facts pages at [adf.org.au/drug-facts](http://adf.org.au/drug-facts).

### First reactions

- **Try to stay calm.** Be honest if you're shocked by the topic but reassure your child that you do want to discuss the issue. This can help them feel like they can talk to you about anything.
- **Thank them for coming to you.** Make sure the first thing you say to your child lets them know you're happy that they want to talk to you. For example, "I'm so happy that you trust me to help you with this."
- **Listen to your child.** Give them a chance to talk through what's going on, without you trying to fix the situation. Often, teenagers aren't expecting you to fix things – they just want you to listen.
- **Avoid being critical or judgmental, or getting emotional.** If you need to let off steam, speak to another adult when your child isn't around.

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## Next steps

- **Take a breather.** If you need a bit of time to calm down or gather your thoughts before you talk, set a time to talk later. Make sure it's soon – don't wait until the next day. The longer you wait, the harder it will be. Your child might go ahead without your input in the meantime.
- **Work together.** If your child has specific issues they want your help with and you're not sure how to advise them, say so. Work with your child to find out what they need to know – for example, the effects of different drugs, the alcohol content in beer vs. wine, etc.
- **Be honest about how you're feeling.** If your child wants your opinion, let your child know how you see the situation rather than telling them what to do. For example, "I would prefer it if you don't go to parties where there's alcohol, but if you're going to go, let's talk about making sure it's safe."

## When your child won't talk

If your child doesn't want to have difficult conversations with you, you could try the following:

- **Try to set aside some time each day to talk.** Ask your child open-ended questions and let them know that if they do want to talk, you're happy to listen. This will help you stay connected with your child and might help them feel more comfortable to come to you in future.
- **Keep up to date with your child's interests.** This gives you things to talk about and shows that you're interested in your child's wellbeing.
- **Bring in back up.** If your child won't talk to you, it might help to find another adult they can talk to. You could suggest a relative, teacher, counsellor or neighbour. But tell your child that you're happy to listen any time they want to talk to you.

## Benefits of difficult conversations

Tackling difficult conversations with your child is a sign that you have a healthy relationship. It helps to keep your relationship with your child close and trusting.

If you're warm, accepting, non-judgmental and uncritical, and also open to negotiating and setting limits, your child is likely to feel more connected to you. They're also more likely to discuss issues with you in the future.

And if you know what's going on in your child's life, you're better placed to help them deal with difficult situations. Discussing tricky topics with you gives your child the opportunity to explore their choices and work out whether they're the right ones for them.

Try to accept difficult conversations with your child. If you do, you can help them make choices that prevent negative consequences.



Source:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/communicating-relationships/tough-topics/difficult-conversations-with-teens>

