



MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS WITH TEENS – by Marney W. DeFoore, LCSW-S

I met recently with a client who in desperation said, “I need to know what to say to my teen. Help me! Every time I ask questions all I hear is ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘I don’t know’.” Here are some ideas that may help in this area.

It is important not to ask closed-ended questions. These require only a simple “yes” or “no” answer. Many adults make themselves feel inept in dealing with teens by listening to answers like, “yes,” “no,” or “I don’t know.” Maybe it’s time to try something new.

You might start by saying, “Tell me about _____,” or “Talk to me about _____,” or “Say what you think about _____.” These are open-ended and give the other person a chance to respond versus requiring an answer.

Here are some more examples. “Tell me what has been going on in your life.” “What’s happening in your circle of friends?” “Talk to me about what you are doing in school. “Say what you are doing new or different with yourself.” “How do you see _____ working for you?” “What is your thinking about _____?” “I’d like to know about _____. Tell me what you know about this.” “Help me understand _____.”

At first your teen will probably think you’ve hit your head on something very hard. After a while, if you don’t give up, you may find that the other person loosens-up and may even start to actually talk with you. You’ll loosen up as well, and this can only help facilitate the intimacy.

Use some of these suggestions and let us know about your results. These can be helpful with a young adult or younger child as well. Remember, the key is to not give up . . . Good Luck!

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