

Teens actually say they want MORE conversation with their parents; not less.

The pre-teen and teen years can be tough years for parents. It gets harder to keep up with our kids' schedules and harder to make sure we're spending quality family time together. While it is developmentally appropriate for teens to want to spend less and less time with their parents and more time with peers, it's important to maintain time to connect and talk about difficult topics. When you add in the rapidly changing information available to our youth and the misinformation from social media, it can feel overwhelming for us as parents to bring up tricky subjects like substance abuse, sexual health or mental health.

Last year however, a local regional coalition held focus groups with teens and with parents, and what they heard was that teens want MORE conversation with their parents, not less....even if they don't act like it. Teens want to have safe conversations where they can ask questions, feel like they are getting true information and even talk about things they might be embarrassed to discuss with their friends. These conversations can also help parents frame the information in terms of their family values and expectations. But, it's important to keep these conversations open and a balanced discussion. So, how do you do this?

1. Ask questions: Hear from your teens what they are talking about with their peers, listen to their questions and their perspective and help them think through the consequences of what they are saying.
2. Research together: the internet can be a great resource or a terrible one. Spend time looking up things you don't know with your kids and then help them decide what is a credible source and what isn't. (hint: TalkSooner.org has helpful information on substance abuse that you can trust).
3. Share stories: The big topics of substance abuse, sexual health and mental health reach all families. We have all been impacted by these things in some way, share the impact that you see and share what you want to see for your youth.
4. Use resources: TalkSooner.org is a locally run website and smartphone app designed to help parents have these conversations. The site is filled with reliable information on a variety of substances along with conversation starter for parents.

# TalkSooner.org