

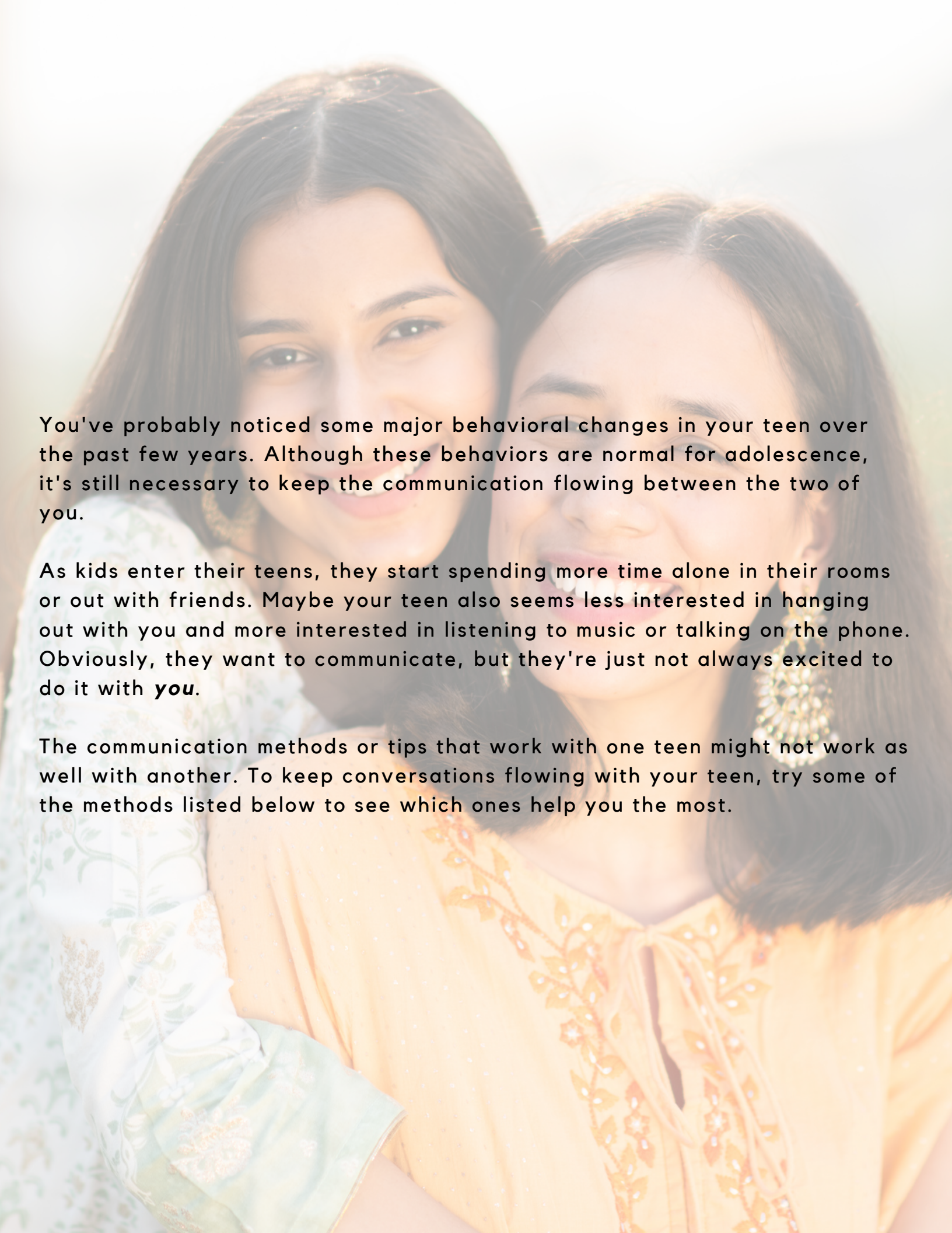
Keeping Communication Open With Your Teen



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You've probably noticed some major behavioral changes in your teen over the past few years. Although these behaviors are normal for adolescence, it's still necessary to keep the communication flowing between the two of you.

As kids enter their teens, they start spending more time alone in their rooms or out with friends. Maybe your teen also seems less interested in hanging out with you and more interested in listening to music or talking on the phone. Obviously, they want to communicate, but they're just not always excited to do it with **you**.

The communication methods or tips that work with one teen might not work as well with another. To keep conversations flowing with your teen, try some of the methods listed below to see which ones help you the most.

1. Rather than doing the talking, focus on listening. I have spent over 15 years working with teens and I have heard repeatedly that they feel like their parents talk "at" or "to" them instead of listening to what they have to say and speaking "with" them.

Because some parents become disappointed about teens withdrawal from the family, they might tend to do all the talking or even become a little "preachy" in their communication. Think back to your teen years. Did that work with you or did it push you further away?

Teens want their parents to focus on what they are saying (listening to them) instead of focusing on what they want to say (preparing their responses). Doing so is more likely to encourage your teen to communicate with you.

2 Show interests in your teen's music, games, books, etc. without judging them. Even though it most likely isn't your choice of tunes, fun or literature, your teen's passions are ways to catch a glimpse into what's going on with her.

When she's talking about songs, her favorite performers, books, or games, use the discussion as a springboard to keep her communicating with you. You'll be surprised with what you learn when you show her you want to know more about what she loves.

3 Take advantage of time spent in the car with your teen. Many parents transport their adolescents to and from school every day during the school year. When it's just the two of you in the car, consider it an opportunity to listen and have a meaningful exchange. "How are you getting along with your teachers?" "Did anything happen today that made you happy/sad?"



4. Carve out time each day to communicate. Avoid allowing the business of everyday life to prevent you from talking with your adolescent. Sometimes, real life takes over and precious time with your teen is difficult to come by. However, make it a point each day to find the time to touch base. Breakfast time, the ride to school, the ride home, early Saturday tea, window shopping, weekend lunches prepared together.

5. Avoid dishing out punishment for info gained during conversations with your teen. She needs to know she can open up without negative consequences. You can surely understand the reasoning behind this strategy - if the teen is punished whenever they open up to you, they'll avoid talking with you in the future.

6. Keep teens involved by allowing them choices. Hopefully, you've worked hard so far in keeping all family members interested and participating in fun activities together, well before your kids moved into the teen years.

If so, use that momentum to encourage your teen to continue to make choices for family get-togethers and activities. Let your teen decide what you'll have to eat at a cookout or special get-together. Enlist your teen to help you plan Dad's or Mom's birthday dinner. Allow them to choose the movie for Family Movie Night.

Teens that have choices at home and are praised for their involvement are less likely to rebel and may spend more time with family.

7. Have fun together. Remember to joke and laugh with your teen. After all, you were a teen once and can hopefully recall what it felt like.

Use your adolescent experience to share funny stories and bond with your teen. They'll most likely appreciate hearing your own stories about adolescence if they're told in the spirit of openness, fun, sharing, and love.

As a parent, you have the responsibility to stay connected with your adolescent. Practice these methods to encourage open communication between you and your teen. You'll be pleased at the responses you get.