



Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®  
**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES**  
Clint Eastwood Youth Program



# You Call This Communicating?

If you have recently tried and “failed” to have a conversation with your teenager, this may sound familiar:

*Hi! How was your day at school? Fine.  
Do you like your teachers? Ummph.  
Are any of your friends in your classes? Yah.  
How's the new history teacher. OK.  
Do you have any homework tonight? I don't know.  
Do you need any supplies? I don't know.  
Would you like me to take you to buy supplies? Maybe  
(answers cell phone).*

Most of us want to connect with our teenagers; we want to know what is going on at school and with their friends, as well as what they're thinking about. At some point, teenagers seem to speak to us as little as possible and, like captured spies, give us only their “name, rank, and serial number.”

## What's a parent to do?

Believe it or not, there are things you can do that will encourage your teens to discuss their feelings, ideas, and views. The first step is learning to listen without judging or giving advice, which is admittedly easier said than done. It means saying things like “Oh,” “Really,” “Funny,” “Mmm,” etc. when they are talking.

Often parents develop a pattern of responding to their children that discourages them from sharing. Would you be eager to talk with a friend or family member who gives advice when it is not asked for?

If you came home tired and angry and grumbled to a friend, “I'm sick and tired of working with that #@%^ boss,” and your friend responded, “Get over it, you're stuck with her” or “You should try working with my #\$@%^ boss, he . . . ,” would this be the friend you turn to next time you need to “let off steam”?

We all want to be listened to and understood. We want those we care about to show us that how we feel matters; even if we are wrong about the facts, we want to be “heard emotionally.”

## Communication 101

When trying to increase communication:

- Listen, listen, listen!
- Work on hearing the other person and responding in a way that keeps him or her talking.

- Keep responses minimal; speak just enough to demonstrate your interest in what the other person has to say.
- Don't scold, preach, judge, criticize, or minimize the feelings expressed.
- Ask questions that encourage greater sharing. Try practicing open-ended inquiries: "Tell me about your first day of school" instead of "How was the first day of school?" Or "I'm interested in hearing about your teachers. Who was the most interesting?" rather than "Do you like your teachers?"

## A difficult period of adjustment

Back in elementary school, maybe even middle school, your children were interested in others' lives; when you talked about work or friends, they listened and wanted to know more (perhaps even listening in on your private conversations). But most high schoolers are more interested in talking on the phone or instant-messaging their friends and have little interest in knowing more about their parents (unless they need money or a ride).

This is part of their learning to separate and become independent, but it is often a very hard time for parents. Talking with friends, other parents, and/or a counselor may help, and knowing it is an appropriate phase that will eventually end can also help.

## Sometimes poor communication is a symptom, not the problem

Lack of communication can be a symptom of an issue much larger than adolescent separation; it is often a symptom of depression. If you see signs of depression, it is important to get a mental health evaluation and start a treatment plan.

Signs of depression include:

- social isolation
- withdrawal from others
- changes in behavior
- changes in sleep/eating habits
- talk about "not being here" or "going away"
- withdrawal from activities they used to be interested in
- a drop in grades

Improving your communication is a goal worth working toward, especially with your children. Improved listening will help you learn how they view their world and may help you identify when you need to just listen and when you need to intervene. The Clint Eastwood Youth Program is here to help.

This information is brought to you by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula's Clint Eastwood Youth Program, providing a structured program to treat drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems.

For more information or to schedule a free screening, please call **373-0924** or **800-528-8080**



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