Talking with teens

Make your conversations easier with these 28 questions

Starting up conversations with your teen can be simple with these questions. Find time each day to ask a question that will get you both talking.
We all feel sad sometimes. But if someone you love often feels sad, hopeless or grouchy, it could be a sign of depression. Finding less joy in activities, sleeping more or less, and eating differently can be signs too.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Anxiety and depression in children cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/depression.html.

To be healthy and rested, it’s important to get enough sleep. Your school-age kids and teens need about 9½ hours each night, and adults need 7–9 hours. Teach your loved ones to keep their phone outside their bedroom and the TV off to help them fall asleep.


Nutrition is important for people of all ages, including growing teens. If what your teen eats, and when, is starting to take over their thoughts. This could be a potential sign of an eating disorder.


Social media can make some people feel anxious. We might worry about what others think. We might worry we’re missing out. And the constant notifications can be stressful.
Feeling happy all the time isn’t realistic. We all have bad days. But if the teen or young adult in your life has been feeling sad for a while, it could be a sign of depression. Other signs include feeling irritable, having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, and feeling guilty or worthless.

When was the last time you felt really happy?

It’s often good to match how we act with the situation. We might be more professional at work and more playful with friends. Yet it’s also important to find our true selves. Be confident in knowing that what makes each of us unique is what makes us great.

Do you act differently at home?

Describe a time when you felt nervous.

Presenting in front of the class. Trying something new. The reason might vary, but we all get nervous sometimes. If you feel this way often, though, it could be a sign of anxiety.

What are you most worried about right now?

Everyone worries sometimes. But constant worries could be a sign of anxiety. If you think it could be affecting your loved one, reach out for help. Healthy eating, exercise, sleep and mindfulness can help as well.
Being grateful can have physical and emotional benefits. That includes reducing stress. Urge your loved ones to think about what they’re grateful for every day. After a week, see if it’s made them feel any different.


We all value different things. For some, relationships — or things that make us think of them — are essential. For others, what we purchase carries great weight. Ask your loved one to take a moment to reflect on what they really care about.


Some habits, like practicing gratitude or getting regular exercise, are great. Others, such as smoking and vaping, aren’t good for our health. If your teen or young adult has a habit they’d like to break, tell them to watch for what triggers them to do the activity and try to remove that cue. Look for ways to replace bad habits with good ones too.


Whether it's a real emergency or everyday life, having a good support system is important. Make sure your loved ones know who they can trust, whether it be friends, family or professionals.

We all experience emotions: We can feel happy, sad, frustrated, angry and far more. Learning to understand and manage our emotions can have a big impact on our lives. It may lead to better grades and test scores in school.

Knowing how to make smart decisions about money often starts with learning about it in the teenage years. Teach your teen about the importance of earning, budgeting and saving. Make sure they know how loans and credit cards work too.

Most teens have heard the question “What do you want to be when you grow up?” It can be intimidating and stressful if, like most teens, they aren't sure. It’s great to set goals and figure out how to achieve them. But make sure you aren’t putting too much pressure on the young people in your life.
Think about the last time someone asked, “How are you doing?” There's a good chance you said, “I'm fine.” But the truth is, we aren't fine all the time. Sometimes we're joyful, angry, sad, nervous, frustrated and so much more. Make sure your teen or young adult understands that it’s OK to admit how they're really feeling — and reach out for help when they need it.

Being a parent is tough. So is being a teen. Be open with each other, and share what you honestly need to feel supported. It might be awkward at first, but it can model a strong relationship. That’s something that will be important for years to come.

Trust, honesty, mutual respect, good communication. What makes a good friend? A good person to date? Make sure your loved ones understand how to pick relationships based on respect.

Building a positive relationship with your teen is important. Be open to their opinions. Truly listen. And show that you care how they feel.


Getting motivated isn’t always easy. Ask your loved ones what helps them reach their goals.

Self-esteem is about valuing and respecting yourself. Encourage your loved ones to think about all their good traits. It can help them have healthy self-esteem. And that can help them feel confident in school, work and other areas of their life.


Being proud of what we do and who we are is important. Encourage the young people in your life to celebrate themselves and what they’ve done. It’s not just about big things. Everyday actions, like being a good friend and helping others, deserve pride too.

Whether it’s reaching an athletic goal, getting the courage to sing in front of an audience or dealing with the loss of a loved one, we all are faced with big challenges. Some we choose and others we have to deal with. Encourage your loved ones to celebrate all that they’ve overcome. Celebrate all that they’re capable of doing in the future too.
Snakes. Flying. Public speaking. Heights. Many of us are afraid of something. Fears aren’t generally harmful, but if you see that your teen or young adult is really going out of their way to avoid something, it could be a phobia — a very strong, ongoing fear. Most phobias can be treated, so encourage your loved one to reach out for help.


What are you most afraid of?

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What was the last kind act you did or saw?

Being kind to others isn’t just good for them. It can also make us happier and healthier. So encourage your loved one to look for ways to be kind every day. Acts that include social contact — like holding the door or sharing a meal with someone — can have even more benefits.


If you could have any superpower, what would it be? And how would you use that in your day-to-day?

We can’t fly, become invisible or do some of the other amazing things that superheroes can do. But we all have things that make us amazing in our own ways. Take a moment to teach your loved ones to value their strengths. And to value those they see in others.

What would a perfect day be like, from the moment you wake up until you fall asleep?

A perfect day might be hard to achieve. But taking time for what we enjoy each day is important. So is time for what’s important to our health. Tell your family to start by making sure they get enough sleep. Then make sure they take some “me time” for reading, hanging out with a friend, playing music or doing something else they enjoy.