

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEENAGER ABOUT HIS/HER MENTAL HEALTH

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/ID PROGRAM
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For many parents talking to their teenager is difficult. The level of difficulty often increases when your teenager has a mental health or behavior challenge.

The **following suggestions** are **written by teens** who are in a support group for mental health.

Tips for Engaging Your Child:

Ask me if it's a good time to talk. I am unique. I may want to talk with you immediately when something is on my mind, or I may only share when there aren't any other distractions and it's just you and me.

Listen to what I say without speaking or interrupting.

Show you are interested by looking me in the eye with real empathy. If I avoid eye contact, know it is just hard for me sometimes.

Sometimes I would rather write you a letter than talk. **Allow me to choose my way to communicate.**

Be patient with me. Sometimes I just can't follow or find the words; be ready to repeat your questions or statements if I ask you to do so.

Be calm. I may be feeling emotions I can't control; being calm will help me and yelling will not.

Allow me to approach you when I feel you are ready to listen to me.

I may not always be comfortable talking with you. If appropriate, **allow me to talk to another trusted adult** to get help.

When I am struggling in school, **ask me about it in an understanding and calm way.** I am most likely already feeling bad about it.

Make sure you **praise me** when appropriate. Otherwise I may think the only time you want to talk is when I have done something you don't like.

Give me time. Let me know I am important to you and I will talk to you when I am ready.

Recognize that **I have my own skills, talents and ideas.**

Speak with me in a gentle manner. When you yell or swear it hurts me, and I may act out or not talk to you.