

how to
CONNECT
WITH YOUR
TEEN

3 simple & effective
tips to create a
loving connection

shahin najak

contents

TIP #1 : MAKE HUGS A HABIT
& WHY THIS WORKS

TIP #2 : MAKE CONVERSATION A HABIT
& WHY THIS WORKS

TIP #3 : LISTEN WITH PRESENCE
& WHY THIS WORKS

BONUS

YOUR THOUGHTS



MINDFUL
CHANGES

tip one

MAKE HUGS A HABIT

*B*efore you ask your teen to do anything at all, give them a hug – a nice, long 10 to 20 second hug. They may not want to hug you, or they may shrug you off, but tell them it's for you – you need it. After about five seconds, just sink into that hug, relax, and take a deep breath.

As you're hugging say: "Let's breathe together."

Make this a habit. You'll find that both you and your child look forward to the hugs.

WHY THIS WORKS

*O*ur brain is like Velcro for the negative and Teflon for the positive; it's just wired that way.

Our emotional brain has memory. The stronger the emotion, the stronger the memory, and the stronger the mental habit.

When we continuously tell our children we love them, and hug them, the emotional memory gets stronger. And here's what happens: in turbulent times, the memory of the hug being a safe place helps to dissolve an argument or ease tense moments.

Parenting is the long process of
letting go and letting be.

tip two

MAKE CONVERSATION A HABIT

At the end of the day, tell them something about what your day was like: how you felt at times, some of your thoughts, what you learned, what made you smile, or what you are grateful for.

Most kids have had a long, tough day at school. Not only social pressures to measure up to, but also homework, peer pressure, and especially if they're introverts, the social stresses of navigating through crowded hallways to and from classrooms.

Instead of asking a general question such as, "How was your day?", change it to something that will have them thinking about something good, like: "Anything interesting happen today?" Encourage your child to share something funny that might have happened or share who they played with, had lunch with or "hung out" with during the day.

Conversations about how they felt during the day create deeper connections, and help them feel safe to talk about the things that may not have gone so well. Allow space for some well-deserved quiet time, where they don't have to put on a brave face, but can just be themselves with you. Let them know you "get it" and that they can relax while you both chat about your day.

WHY THIS WORKS

We want to model social behavior for them, and we want to be social with our children. They will very soon be adults, and we want to start having normal conversations with them that don't revolve around "to-do lists." We want to talk about "how we are today" – what our thoughts, emotions, and musings were about the day.

We are also modelling gratitude when we talk about what we were grateful for that day. When we model good social and conversational skills, it's not surprising that teens will acquire those skills too. And practicing social skills, much like exercising physical skills, protects against anxiety and depression.



Let children see your
vulnerabilities and
they will let you in.

tip three

MAKE A HABIT OF LISTENING WITH PRESENCE

When your teen is talking to you and telling you something about their day, really listen. Put aside whatever it is you are doing and sit down beside your child and just listen. No judgements, no advice, no offering solutions, no “you should” or “well, why didn’t you...”

A child’s brain (and ours) shuts down when they feel they aren’t being listened to. Think about the last time you were telling a story or relating an experience or incident, and the listener chimed in with their story or a “you should fix it this way” solution. How did that make you feel? Did you feel like continuing the conversation or were you a little deflated?

Let your children talk. These are precious moments where parents get insight into their child’s personality, their thoughts, their wants, likes and dislikes. Revel in the conversation by listening with an inner gratitude that your child is telling you about their day. While you’re listening, notice your mental conversation. What are you telling yourself?

Being mindful of our internal self-talk allows us to know ourselves and cultivates mindful listening. Allow your child the gift of your presence. Let them be, and only chime in when the need arises, and do so with kindness and compassion.

WHY THIS WORKS

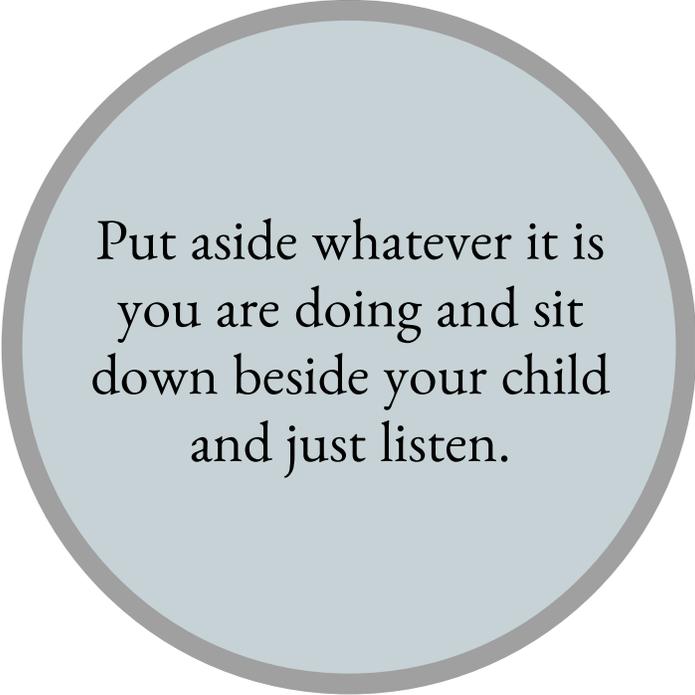
Children want to be heard and seen. A child that is heard and seen feels loved. Feeling loved cultivates closeness and allows our children to be open and honest with us.

Remember, our brain is wired for the negative. Research shows that it takes five affirming, loving statements to negate one negative statement.

We can commit to verbalizing more loving and supportive statements to our children.

We all hear the negatives more than the positives. Our job as parents is to decrease the negative and increase the positive.

To help you get started, try the five conversation starters on the next page...



Put aside whatever it is
you are doing and sit
down beside your child
and just listen.

bonus

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Take turns with these questions. Listen without judgment and be aware of tone, facial gestures, and body language. Children are very attuned to what we are thinking, so our body language needs to match our words.

1. Tell me one thing about you that you don't think I know.
2. Describe your personality to me — who you are when you're at your very best.
3. Tell me something that I've done that really annoyed you but now you're glad I did it.
4. What mask do you wear around your friends that you wish you didn't have to?
5. What's the best advice you've ever given? Or received?
6. Describe three qualities you appreciate about yourself.
7. What is the best advice you've ever given?
8. What is the best advice you've ever been given?
9. What does your "perfect" day look like?
10. What is your most treasured memory?

