

Parents, It is Important To...

Show your teen respect by listening to their feelings, accepting their point of view, and treating them as you would want to be treated. Have reasonable expectations for responsible behavior. Give teens household chores and projects that will instill pride and the know-how for completing tasks. Allow teens to learn from consequences by requiring them to be responsible for their actions. Provide your teen with choices, but accept their decisions and follow through with consequences if necessary. Implement "bottom line" guidelines and consistent ramifications for misbehavior. Learn to negotiate rather than demand by utilizing "I" statements when expressing a complaint. But, most importantly, communicate love, allow for fun, quality time with your teen, promote self-esteem through encouragement, and focus on your child's positive behavior.

Each year, over 1,000,000 children run away from home. It is estimated that one out of every seven children will run away sometime between the ages of 10 and 18. At VCA, runaways account for the majority of missing children cases. Many teens experience problems that for whatever reason appear to become difficult to deal with; so rather than face their problems, they choose to run away from them. Though some runaways do think it is safer on the streets than it is at home, once on the street, many report that as bad as things may have been at home, life on the street is even worse. Most leave home without understanding the daily problems they will encounter after they have run away; they only want to escape the problems in their current situation. Because runaways vary so much by age, economic status, education, and race, there are no "typical" runaways. However, the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART) provides us with the following profile for many runaways.

NISMART FACTS ON RUNAWAYS

- 68% were 16-17 years old
- 58% were females
- 28% ran from two-parent households
- 66% stayed with someone they knew
- 49% returned within two days
- 90% stayed within 100 miles from home
- 82 % were accompanied by others during their episode
- 34% of these children have run away at least once before in the past 12 months.
- Runaway episodes occur more often in the summer

Who We Are

The Vanished Children's Alliance (VCA) incorporated in 1981, was created to address the growing need for victim parents to obtain credible, effective, and compassionate assistance in the location, recovery, reunification, and reintegration of their missing or abducted child(ren).

VCA is the oldest and most experienced missing children's organization in the United States. VCA is a national non-profit 501(c)3 corporation providing nationwide and overseas assistance to families in all categories of missing children; family and non-family (stranger and acquaintance) abductions, runaways, and otherwise missing or lost children.

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VCA services to law enforcement and families of missing and abducted children are free of charge. In order to provide these services, VCA, a nonprofit organization, relies on the generosity of the community. Your tax-deductible donation makes the provision of these services possible.



Vanished Children's Alliance

Teen Talk: A guide for Parents & Guardians



*“Making
Homecomings
Possible”*

Communication with your teen

...can be one of life's biggest challenges, but one of life's most fulfilling accomplishments.

Parents, have you ever wondered "is my child normal?", "Where did they get those pants?", or "Who would pay for a haircut like that?" But recall when you were a teenager, did your parents also wonder why your blue jeans were so tight or why you were always in need of a haircut? New parents are often warned about the "terrible twos," but they are seldom advised of the trials and tribulations they may encounter during their child's teenage years. It is easy to remember when your child was young and you encouraged their independence by helping them to take their first steps. As they grew older, you dreamed of when they could dress and feed themselves. But now, as they stumble through adolescence, they are testing the limits of freedom. And test, after test, after test, it is tempting for parents to let their teenagers figure out adulthood on their own. However, now more than ever, as your children grow and, hopefully, you grow with them, you should not stop parenting. The focus merely shifts to helping your children learn how to become mature, responsible young adults.

Teenagers today are often confronted with far more decisions and temptations than teenagers of the past. Aside from the normal growing pains relating to peer pressure, dating, changes in their bodies, and everyday "high school life," today's youth must contend with broken families, gangs, drugs, alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases, and an overall increased prevalence in crime, violence, and physical/emotional abuse. For these reasons, communication between parent and teen becomes all the more important. Teens need their parent's guidance and emotional support more than ever; they need to feel as if they are a priority in their parents' lives.

Parents, remember: *communication is a two-way street*. Both parties must consciously make time to sit down, talk, and listen to each other to be sure that their messages are being heard. Because many parents talk at their teen, constantly demanding and giving orders, several communication tips are listed below for parents.

- Sit alone with your child and just let them talk about the things going on in their lives.
- Specifically ask your teen about their plans and their goals in life.
- Ask your teen about their fears and concerns.
- Listen! Listen! Listen!

Confronting your teen

A healthy confrontation with your teen is better than avoidance or overreaction to the inevitable frustrations of living with an adolescent. By focusing on the subject of confrontation rather than the person who has committed the deed at hand, parents and children can move past the unnecessary hurt and anger that often results from disagreements. And although conflict if

uncomfortable for everyone involved, it shows that family members care about one another. When handled appropriately, conflicts also have the potential of producing creative solutions and closer, more trusting relationships.

Having someone who really cares and is available to listen makes a tremendous difference in a young person's life. Ultimately, it enables most teens to overcome their adolescent problems and go on to a happy and successful future. However, parents should keep in mind that communication consists of more than words: it also involves slamming doors (anger), "the cold shoulder" (silence), sighs, sarcasm, body language, and more. For these reasons, it is helpful for parents to assess the confrontation by asking themselves:

- How do I feel following a confrontation with my teen? Anger, annoyance, vengeful, or do I just give up?
- How does my teen respond?
- Does my response reinforce negative behavior or encourage positive behavior? Which does my child expect?
- Can I avoid anger, hostility, and sarcasm by promoting kindness, understanding, and compromise?
- Can you identify your own feelings, label those feelings, and determine the most appropriate way to respond? Try to control your response to the feelings rather than allowing the feelings to control you.

Conflict Resolution

1. Treat your children with respect in order to establish trust and openness.
2. Be assertive and express your feelings with "I" statements such as "I have difficulty understanding."
3. Don't make "You" statements which assign blame and cause defensiveness, such as "You had better...."
4. Identify the problem by asking, "Can you help me determine what the problem may be?"
5. Describe the problem...briefly and accurately.
6. Confirm that each person was heard and understood by the other person.
7. Listen to what your teen said and then restate it, to their satisfaction, before continuing.
8. Solicit your teen's needs to how to resolve the issue by asking, "What would you like me to do about the problem?"
9. Check your understanding of your teen's needs by asking, "Is this what you want me to do?"
10. State your own needs by saying what you would like your teen to do for you.
11. Don't hide your feelings—continue to express them with "I" statements, but avoid the words "always" and "never"
12. Negotiate a solution with an "I will/You will" contract. Be flexible! The goal is to achieve a realistic consensus.
13. Write down the arrangement and decide on a date when each person will accomplish their part of the contract.
14. Agree on a date to follow up on the solution and evaluate everyone's progress.

Teen Behavior

During the teenage years, adolescents are struggling with changes and growth in their bodies and their minds. VCA can enable parents to better understand their child's behavior with helpful communication tips and counseling/resource referrals. At this age, teens want to be noticed; they want your attention and they will do whatever is necessary to receive it. However, if you become annoyed and show anger, they will have achieved their goal. Thus, the solution is to give your teen attention for positive behavior at times when they least expect it, not just when they demand it.

Because many teens feel significant when they are in charge or are the boss, they seek control through "power trips." If you feel angry when your authority is challenged, they have achieved their goal. The solution is to disengage from the power struggle; it only stimulates rebellion and more anger. Remember, teens can't take control if you won't play the game.

When teens have been hurt, they feel that the only way they can be significant is by hurting others. In actuality, they are seeking revenge. If you feel discouraged and want to retaliate, you have allowed them to accomplish their goal. Instead, remain calm until the feeling of retaliation passes.

Finally, it is natural to feel frustrated during your child's teenage years. However, you must not give up. Quitting is easiest when your teen show signs of low self-esteem, non-acceptance of responsibility, and feelings of inadequacy or incompetence. If you find yourself agreeing with their feelings of incompetence and worthlessness, you should change your focus. Try to focus on the positive; that is, eliminate the criticism and concentrate on their assets and strong points.

Teen Behavior to Note

- ◆ Is s/he having problems in school? Are his/her grades dropping?
- ◆ Watch for sudden and abnormal changes in mood, behavior, and/or habits.
- ◆ Watch for sudden changed in friends or companions and a withdrawal from old friends and family.
- ◆ Has there been an increase in rule breaking and signs of rebellion?
- ◆ Does your child tend to have violent displays of temper?
- ◆ Has there been a death, remarriage, divorce, or other family crisis?
- ◆ Has there been an accumulation of money and possessions?
- ◆ Does s/he talk about running away or talk of friends who have run away?
- ◆ Does your child have a history of depression, anxiety, or fear?
- ◆ Is s/he displaying a tendency to consume alcohol or take drugs?