



☺ Things to do With a Teenager ☺

- Ask for a detailed description of his/her day. If the teen has trouble with that, role model by offering a description of your day. You are teaching social skills!
- Volunteer together in the community
- Take a class together: dance; cooking; art; academic...anything related to his/her strengths, interests and goals
- Play with a dog together. Show the teen how to groom and train the dog.
- Cook together. You can use the kitchen at the Boys & Girls Club (Santa Cruz) or the YWCA (Watsonville).
- Get some exercise. Walk on the beach, hike in the woods, ride bikes...
- Try some do-it-yourself manicures, pedicures, and/or facials
- Drive around listening to music. (Yes, really. Teens love that.)
- Window shop
- Help the teen look for work. If he/she is 15 or older, connect him/her to the Youth Employment Program (your Case Supervisor will have details!).
- Learn a new skill/craft together (e.g., origami; beading; sewing; etc.)
- Browse at a music store or book store
- Work on a scrapbook/life book for the teen
- Build a bonfire on the beach and roast marshmallows
- Tour a college campus. Meet with people from admissions and financial aid.
- If the teen is 15 or older, make sure he/she has been referred to the Independent Living Program (ILP). Social Workers make those referrals. Check in with the teen on a regular basis to make sure he/she is participating in ILP workshops and activities. This program helps prepare teens for emancipation!
- Go to an all-ages concert together
- Go to events on college campuses. UCSC events can be found here: http://www.ucsc.edu/news_events/ and Cabrillo College events can be found here: <http://cabrillo.edu/news/index.html>.
- Try to limit movies & mall visits. Work on getting them out of their comfort zones and trying new things!
- Take a camera on all of your visits and ask the teen to take pictures
- Challenge yourselves to learn something new, like 50 phrases in a foreign language, 20 constellations, etc. Learn 1 new thing each visit.
- Go to a museum. Afterwards, discuss favorites from the exhibits.
- Pretend to be tourists. Spend the day visiting all the sites of Santa Cruz. Take a walking tour: <http://www.ci.santa-cruz.ca.us/pl/hpc/hpcsite/walkingtours.html>.
- Make holiday/birthday cards & gifts for upcoming occasions

- Go bowling; hit golf balls; go to batting cages:
http://www.surfcitybaseball.com/facility_pictures.html
- See CASA of Santa Cruz County's CASA Activity Guide (under the Volunteer tab on our website) for information about additional activities!

How to Help Yourself Connect with Teen Culture

- Watch MTV
- Listen to KDON (102.5)
- Read a teen magazine
- Hang out at a skate park
- Shadow at your teen's school & observe how the teens interact
- Go to a high school performance (e.g., choir; theater; dance; talent show).
Observe the performers and how they are supported by the youth in the audience.
- Check out your teen's account on My Space as well as his/her friends' accounts

Important Things to Remember When Interacting with Teens

From Hugh O'Neill's article "Speaking In Teen"

- "Adolescents are on an important mission. In a way, their job is to move out into the jungle on their vision quest – and away from you. So don't look for too much from them. Don't be all up in their grille about sharing. One of the few sweet things about being a teenager is feeling pain in private. It's bad enough when some cheerleader busts your son into a million pieces, but it becomes unbearable if you, Dad, feel like talking about it! Teenagers don't want you to catch them when they trip. Move back. The kids need a background sense that you're over there on your side of the river caring about them, but the only way they'll ever reach out is if you allow them not to."
- "In moments when a teenager does reach out, it's pivotal to focus completely. No shuffling through the mail and listening with one ear. Sure, we've got a million things on our multitasking minds, but giving this precious child your full attention is, all by itself, a gesture of respect that will open up things between you."
- "Flatten your voice. Kids are able to read volumes of meaning into every meaningless...inflection. I'm not suggesting that you speak like Mister Rogers – he'll think you've had a stroke – but favor plain over fancy. Be straightforward. Don't depend on tone. Be thoughtful, not fast; clear, not clever."
- "I made the mistake of thinking my kids would be reassured to know that when I was young, I had some of the same feelings they were having. Wrong. It made their feelings seem like a cliché. In general, try not to view their feelings through the prism of their age. Kids, quite rightly, hate being seen as the 12 billionth person to go through a stage of life. They'd rather savor their feelings as though nobody else has ever gone through the gauntlet of adolescence. Fair enough."

- “Don’t be so sure. When my kids were teens and they seemed troubled, I assumed that my steadiness could help them. Wrong. In fact, it was an insult to their confusion. In a way, the secret to talking to kids is to respect uncertainty, timidity, fear – all the traits that grown men are trained to disdain. In a storm, our instinct is to be a pillar of strength. But buoys are far more helpful.”
- “Don’t be Mr. Problem-Solver. We have this instinct to offer counsel and, apparently even worse, to suggest a way to fix a problem. Imagine that; all they want is sympathy, and we insist on tying off the veins and stitching up the wound. People want to work through problems themselves. Be sympathetic, and, if they ask, be prepared to offer a gentle, maybe, oh, I-don’t-know, give-this-some-thought suggestions. But this is their process; they won’t appreciate you cutting it short.”
- “Get smaller. When our kids are small, we tend to tell stories of our successes. That’s all to the good; kids are well served by a model of a man who has made his way competently through the world. But as your kids’ complexion heads south, put some blemishes on your record, too. Start to mix in a few tales about your setbacks. No, not the really dark stuff, but start to ease your way down off the pedestal a bit and give the kids a fuller picture of the old man. It will help your teenagers talk to you if they can see you as a seeker, too - a person who has had stumbles and falls - and if they can sense that nobody’s life is a painless progression forward.”