

# How do I get my kids to listen, talk, help out & focus on what really matters?

As parents, each of us has our kid's best interests at heart — everyone knows this... except sometimes, our kids! When they move from childhood to adolescence, we want them to be developing a certain amount of independence. But this can be hard if we are used to making decisions and doing things for them!

Everything changes in adolescence — what we say, isn't necessarily received as the 'only truth' any more. They won't decide to take the school subject we think they should (because we believe it's important or they're very talented at it!) and so it continues!

## WHAT HELPS? HERE ARE A FEW TIPS:

Getting them to talk and listen (it's the same thing really!)

- Listen without judgment or trying to 'fix' the situation. Tricky — but if we 'overreact' it can deter them from talking to us.
- Offer support and let them choose whether they need you to help now or down the track (e.g. "I am here for you, always. Anytime.").
- Believe your kid. If they tell you something that's happened or how they're feeling, or the impact of something — it's real, it's their perspective and it's usually appropriate for the circumstances (e.g. "That's really tough!").
- Mistakes = life. As much as we want to protect or minimise the chances of our kids making mistakes, it is really important that we let them learn from these. Support them when they feel they've failed and give some examples of times when you have too.

- The deal is kids will listen if they feel heard and talk if they feel listened to. Just stop what you are doing from time to time and really 'be' with your teen — the silence is okay. Not knowing the answers is okay and that good advice? Just "sit on it" for now, or wait until they ask.
- Keep an ear out (without intruding too much!) — when they're on the phone, facetime, talking to mates or siblings and sometimes even to the pet. Teens are talking and if we hear it, we're allowed to ask if they're okay in it and practice all of the above!

That education and trying to get them to take it seriously:

- Support your teen in what they want to do. Validate their choices even if they're not what you want. Ultimately, it's their decision.
- Propelling kids to make career and education decisions early can cause anxiety. Careers tend to be much more fluid now — you begin a journey and may or may not end up somewhere completely different!
- Let them be kids while they're young and support their interests and passion. If they do that, this is likely to lead their education and career journey.

And as for all that housework that "doesn't just do itself"

- Acknowledge and praise what they do already (e.g. "I really appreciate it when you tidy up").
- Ask for help when you need it (e.g. "I'm really tired. I'd love if you could help me with the dishes tonight.")

- Talk about shared responsibilities and ask that everyone contribute, rather than just your teen.

Believe it or not, these tips came from teens! We thought they were amazing — insightful and practical, and better than we'd ever found in any parenting book or resource. Thanks to the young people at Bounce for teaching us a thing or 20!

If you've just "eye-rolled" — it's possible your teen is likely feeling 'less than valuable'. They may be learning to manage on their own or turning to others, rather than coming to you for advice and ideas. You might be reading this because you've noticed this shift already. To get kids to talk and listen — they need to know the important adults in their life (you!) are on their team and believe in them.

## WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS AND RESEARCH SAYS

- Focus on strengths**  
We love and recommend focusing on your child's strengths. Coming from a positive place always makes a difference and there's a lot of research surrounding how this approach can build resilience, increase confidence and happiness and strengthen relationships. All great things if you want to connect with your teen and get them motivated. [Discover your strengths together!](#)
- Embrace a growth mindset**  
It's worth you and your teen knowing about adopting a growth mindset. This means that instead of believing we've failed we understand we can still learn, grow and achieve. It can also be referred to as "The Power of Yet", so while you can't do that 'yet', you're learning to. There is heaps of [information here](#) on the benefits. Talking this through with your teen is both empowering and a chance for them to see you learning too.
- Be aware of your expectations**  
Teens look like they should be competent, and they can be – just ask them to fix that tech issue with your phone! But in many ways they're still learning and developing. If you want them to unpack the dishwasher, do it with them, until they're able to do it on their own. This also equals time together – to talk and listen (Nobilo, 2017).
- Focus on today**  
If things haven't been great in the past between you and your teen, that doesn't mean they can't change, but you'll have to lead the way. A supportive, positive and respectful relationship provides the basis for the best outcomes for kids. To learn more, check out our [Parent hub](#) or choose a book that appeals to you from any good bookshop (recommendations below).

- Chores and careers**  
Chores are important and Julie Lythcott-Haims will [tell you why](#). And she might dispel your fears about needing to choose a career path and university early!
- Forming great habits**  
We have some handy advice on establishing and [fostering good routines](#) (which include chores) and the other option which is kind of fun is to use a [habit stick](#). If you'd like your teen to establish good routines and habits, we recommend you start by supporting them to develop a tiny, really easy habit that encourages their own goals (e.g. if they want to learn to play guitar, they might always play one song at 5pm). We also recommend you establish a tiny, positive habit too!

## BOOKS WE LOVE

- Anything by Dan Siegel! His books are widely available in NZ from good bookstores or online. But check out his [website too](#) – particularly his videos, they're really informative and entertaining.
- Engaging Adolescents: Parenting Tough Issues with Teenagers by Michael Hawton
- The Good Teen: Rescuing Adolescence from the Myths of the Storm and Stress Years by Richard M Lerner

## REFERENCES

- Lythcott-Haims, J. How to Raise Successful Kids Without Over-Parenting. [https://www.ted.com/talks/julie\\_lythcott\\_haims\\_how\\_to\\_raise\\_successful\\_kids\\_without\\_over\\_parenting/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/julie_lythcott_haims_how_to_raise_successful_kids_without_over_parenting/transcript?language=en) Ted Conference. 2015.
- Nobilo, H. (2017). An Insight into Adolescence, by The Brainwave Trust. [http://www.brainwave.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/insight\\_to\\_adolescence.pdf](http://www.brainwave.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/insight_to_adolescence.pdf)

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