

What You're Saying/What I'm hearing & Suggestions

When you say:

"I'm really disappointed in you." OR "You've lost sight of what's important."

I might think you mean:

"You're a loser; you're stupid; you haven't met my expectations of you."

Instead, you might ask:

"What do you think about your decision?" OR "Have you thought carefully about your actions?"

When you say:

"Just because." OR "Because I said so."

I might think you mean:

"You're not worth the time it would take me to explain myself." OR "You wouldn't understand."

Instead:

Be patient and explain your reasons for feeling the way you do.

When you say:

"You keep closing doors/missing important opportunities." OR "You're not reaching your potential." OR "You're not trying enough."

I might think you mean:

"You're going to be a failure in life; you're not capable; you're not trying."

Instead, you might say:

"I just want to be sure you're thinking about your choice."

When you say:

“Your grades show me that you’re not trying hard enough.”

I might think you mean:

“You can’t handle yourself; trying is the only thing that gets good grades”; OR “It makes it seem like you are not acknowledging that I am trying.”

Instead, you might say:

“Do you think the grades you got are what you deserve?” OR “Do you need help?” OR “What can I do to help you do better?”

When you say:

“Is there something going on I should know about?”

I might think you mean:

“You are doing something wrong and sneaking” (I feel like I am being accused of something).

Instead, you might say:

“Do you want to talk?” OR “Is there something bothering you?” OR “What can I do to make things better for you?”

When you say:

“I trust you, but I don’t trust the other people/your friends.”

I might think you mean:

“I don’t like your friends.” OR “I don’t trust you.”

Instead, you might say:

“You are making it hard for me to trust you.” OR “I feel nervous about the situation because something bad could happen.”

When you say:

“You don’t use drugs, do you?” OR “You’ve never tried alcohol, have you?”

I might think you mean:

“I expect one specific answer from you and you may have to lie to answer me.”

Instead, you might say:

“What choices have you and your friends made about using drugs and alcohol?” OR “Are kids doing that these days?”

**General suggestions for dialogue between teens and parents
(compiled by high school peer educators)**

- Tone and body language are very important. Don’t phrase questions so the teen is on the defensive.
- Don’t tag team with another parent.
- Listen without judgment – show them you’re listening without ‘being a parent’.
- Set up a dynamic of trust and don’t break it with things like, “Why did you throw that in the trash?”
- Be direct but calm – don’t beat around the bush.
- Don’t ask questions that you already know the answer to, or that your teen can’t answer like, “What were you thinking? Why would you do that?”
- Ask specific questions about school like, “What class did you like/dislike the most today?” instead of, “How was your day at school?”
- Try not to talk to your friends about us when we can hear you.
- Please don’t guilt trip. For example, “We do so much stuff for you.”
- Try to avoid giving the same speech multiple times. If you realize you’re repeating something you’ve said many times, ask your teen what would work better, and explain your goal to them.
- Don’t ever stop using positive statements, or telling your teen that you love them or are proud of them. When all we have with you is conflict or fighting, it’s easy to forget that you want the best for us.