

How well do you know your teen's mental health?

One of the biggest challenges parents and caregivers face with their teens is engaging them in meaningful conversation. Attempts to do so are often met with one-word replies, grunts, blank stares, restlessness, or teens just playing on their phones.

Finding the right time and place to talk to your teen are critical factors for success. While we offer some ideas, the best time and place to talk with your teen is **anytime and anywhere where both you and your teen are comfortable**.

Here's our list of the top 5 times and places to start the conversation:

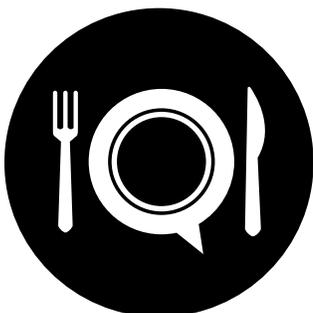


1 - In the car

For many parents and caregivers, driving your teen to and from school, sporting events, lessons, and friends' houses seems like an endless task. It does, however, afford the sometimes rare occurrence of private time with your teen.

A car can be a comfortable environment for your teen since it minimizes eye contact, which some teens can find a little nerve-wracking. It also has the added benefit that when the conversation ends, the radio can be turned back up, offering an easy transition into lighter topics.

Although your teen may be playing on their phone or looking out the window, they are most likely listening to what you have to say.



2 - Mealtimes

Consider mealtimes an opportunity to share with and listen to your teen non-judgmentally on a variety of different topics. It's a good time because, as we eat, our blood sugar levels begin to moderate and we're able to stay focused and engaged throughout the conversation.

Eating together as a family has proven benefits. Studies show that participating in family dinners are linked to positive behaviours such as lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy and depression, as well as higher grades and self-esteem.¹

The table should be a safe zone where everyone can unwind, catch up on each other's activities, and share the positive and challenging aspects of the day. To limit distractions, you may want to consider setting some rules such as having no electronic/mobile devices, not answering phone calls or text messages or reading/working at the table.



3 - Spending Time Together

Rather than simply starting a conversation with your teen, consider talking while doing something together. It could be something simple like going for a walk, taking the dog out or throwing a ball around together in the park. Or, it might involve attending a sports game or event together. Even better is doing something together that your teen suggests.

Because of the developmental processes of adolescence, and particularly the way the teenage brain develops, involving teens in

something active offers a greater chance of achieving higher levels of engagement.²



4 - While Being Entertained

Try watching a movie, YouTube video or TV show with your teen and use the situations that arise in these shows to spark a conversation and solicit their thoughts on how they would react in similar situations. Entertainment can offer a great entry into a conversation with your teen as the situations shift focus away from them and towards characters they may identify with.

Teens often enjoy talking about celebrities, music or the latest movies. Using pop culture is a great way to start a conversation, even if you know very little about the subject – it gives your teen the opportunity to fill in any gaps and bring you up to speed.



5 - On Their Time

You never know when or where your teen will be in the mood to talk. Giving them control over when or where (and even what to talk about) is key. It may be at midnight when they get home from a night out with their friends or it may be when you're trying to make dinner for the family. But, whenever it does strike, be sure to seize the opportunity – be available and listen actively and non-judgmentally.

¹Dr. Anne K. Fishel, <http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/resources/faq/>

²Chris Hudson, <http://understandingteenagers.com.au/blog/go-with-the-flow-10-ways-to-easily-engage-teenagers/>