

By BJ Mann

Connecting with Your Teen: It /S Possible

Once upon a time you were the center of your child's universe. Remember? If only you could save some of that limitless desire for your attention and company for use during those teenage years. While you want your children to develop their independence, there are moments, especially around the holidays, when you may yearn for a closer connection. Here are some ways you can foster and maintain that desired connection with your teen:

Planning: "Hey kids let's do something together today" often does not work. It turns into a conversation about who wants to do what and all the rest that can sabotage your good intentions. Planning further ahead can help. Set aside some time just to plan together, brainstorm options and have fun with it. Let everyone throw in ideas, with no critical commentary, and see what develops. Take that list and use them for more than one family event.

Learn something new: Ask your kids to teach you something they're excited about. Maybe it's My Space, Face Boo, Digg or Wikipedia. Maybe they can introduce you to the world of IM (Instant Messaging). Kids relish the opportunity to teach you-be open and let them. Music and media can also be a great connection. Listen to what's playing on their I-Pod; watch a television program or a movie they love. Ask them to tell you why they like it.

Volunteer Together: Most teens are interested in some part of the community, whether it's the environment, animals, violence prevention, or the underprivileged. There are many places that families can volunteer together and share in the opportunity to do something good for others. It's a great experience as a family and lots of fodder for conversation.

New Vocabulary: Listen to yourself. Are you making requests or demands? A request is a way of asking for your needs to be met and a willingness to discuss the options available to meet those needs. Try not to use words like "should" and "deserve," and focus on your needs. For example, you might say to your college student, "I'm glad you're home and am so looking forward to connecting with you and spending some time together. What kind of things would you like to do?" With patience, and without guilt, you'll be surprised with the response.

Staying connected to family members is not just for the holidays, although it may seem quite intense during this time. Connecting with people fuels our feelings of love and happiness all year long. Listening, respecting each other's needs and feelings, being flexible, voicing our honest emotions can help create that closeness not just at the holidays but every day.

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Little Things Mean a Lot

Simple Steps for Staying Connected & Showing your Teen you Care:

1. Compliment them. On clothing, an assignment or any thing well done. Everyone loves to be acknowledged.
2. Surprise them with a small gift for no other reason than "I was just thinking about you."
3. Share stories with them (positive ones!) about your teen years. Let them know you can relate to their age.
4. Ask their opinion on an issue or even what you are wearing. Your teens like being treated with respect, and knowing you appreciate their ideas.
5. Play it their way – tune in to their favorite radio station while driving somewhere. You may not be talking, but they'll get that you're connecting with them.