

STAYING CLOSE THROUGH THE TEENAGE YEARS

How to Build Warmth & Connection with Your Tween or Teen

WHY CONNECTION MATTERS

As children grow into adolescence, the way we connect with them shifts — but their need for warmth, safety, and love remains strong. When parents show up with warmth and presence, teens are more likely to connect, helping them to build resilience, make healthy decisions, feel emotionally safe, and communicate openly.

WAYS TO BUILD WARMTH & CONNECTION

- **Be present, even in small moments** - Put your phone down and show interest when your teen talks. A few minutes of undivided attention can go a long way toward building and strengthening your connection.
- **Listen more than you talk** - Be curious, not critical - avoid judgmental language. Let them speak without jumping in to fix, correct or advise. Use reflective statements like, "That sounds really frustrating."
- **Show that you like them** - Smile when they enter the room, notice and name what they are doing well, and express affection in ways that are comfortable to them (words, gestures or acts of support).
- **Make time to connect & share moments of joy** - Share meals, laugh together, play a game, go for a walk, cook a favorite meal, watch a movie, or just sit quietly near each other. Positive shared experiences strengthen your bond.
- **Respect their growing independence** - Give them room to express their opinions and make age-appropriate decisions. Respect their space, but show-up consistently for them. Show that you trust them and they'll be more likely to trust you.
- **Be reliable, consistent and calm** - Warmth doesn't mean that there aren't boundaries. Stay calm and consistent with limits while showing care and empathy. Follow through on promises and keep your word.
- **Empower and encourage them** - Give them a voice, a choice and responsibility when possible. Support their independence even when it's messy. Acknowledge effort, not just outcomes by saying, "I noticed how hard you worked."

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Try these simple ways to open up a connection:

- What was the best part of your day?
- If you could change one thing about school, what would it be?
- What's something that you wish adults understood better about teens?
- What's something that made you laugh recently?
- If you could plan the perfect weekend, what would it include?

WHEN THINGS GET MESSY

Conflict is a normal part of life.

Sometimes things get messy. It's important to be a role model when conflict arises. Teens need emotional co-regulation - your calm helps them to find their calm.

If emotions start to get heated, pause and take a breath before reacting in anger. It's okay to say, "Let's take a break and talk in a bit." Set a time and be sure to return to the conversation when things are calmer.

Focus on the issue, not the person. Use "I" statements like, "I feel worried when..."

REPAIR AFTER CONFLICT

Model healthy conflict resolution. Apologize if you overreact, say something hurtful or when you're wrong - it models emotional maturity and builds trust. Reming them, "I may not always get it right, but I'll always care."

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

BStrong Together
www.bstrongtogether.org

The Center for Parent and Teen Communication
www.parentandteen.com

Parenting Teens & Tweens
www.parentingteensandtween.com

WARMTH ISN'T ABOUT BEING PERFECT – IT'S ABOUT BEING PRESENT.
Let your tween or teen know they're loved, even on the hard days. Just keep showing up.