

5 Reasons You Are Being Shut Out by Your Teenager

Many years ago, I met weekly with a group of teenage guys. We would meet for breakfast to talk about life, struggles, faith and relationships.

When a couple of the guys in the group got into a fistfight playing basketball, I gathered everyone to discuss it. My goal was to get all of our issues on the table so that type of thing never happened again. It was a long and difficult meeting. I handed out some regrettable and harsh reprimands.

However, I thought we left in a good place, but would eventually learn otherwise. The next time I saw them was at a game. When I said, "Hello," they just kept on walking past me. Many attempts to initiate were met with silence. I was being shut out.

Being shut out by a teenager is a painful experience. Are you getting one-word answers and blank stares when you attempt conversation? Is your teenager giving you the cold shoulder? Do you want to know why? Here are 5 reasons you are being shut out by your teenager:

1. They are feeling pressured. Teenagers today are under more stress than we ever experienced. The expectations placed on them to perform are through the roof. Teens are weighed down by neverending sports schedules, three-hour nightly homework and studying, forced advanced placement classes, performing arts, community service hours, and holding down part-time jobs. Add to that the social pressures and the awkward changes of adolescence. Teenagers are getting pressure from every area of their life. It's a lonely feeling. If they see you as another pressure point rather than an ally, they'll shut their door and seek refuge.

Advice: Show them empathy regarding the pressure they are under. Do your best to understand it. If they are failing in school, use phrases such as "How can I help you?" or "What can we do about this?" so they know you are there for support. Reduce the amount of activities. They won't want to so you may have to give them activity choices to cut and set boundaries for their own welfare.

2. They feel misunderstood. They have been marginalized. Everyone tells them what to do while giving them little respect. A consistent complaint I heard from teenagers while in their world was that adults didn't listen to them. They felt like no one understood them nor took the time to get to know them. Many times, adults assume they understand teenagers because they were once one. It's a poor and dangerous assumption. Not only is each person unique, but the world has changed.

Advice: Assume you know nothing. Gain as much intel as you can. Ask a lot of questions and resist the temptation of telling them what to do. Talk to their friends if they are over. If they start giving you cold one-word answers, back off. They probably feel interrogated. It just means you have to take it slower.

3. They are tired of being micromanaged. As adults, we feel like we are just trying to save them from all of our mistakes. So when they do something wrong, we are quick to correct. They see it as constant criticism and feel suffocated. This is exacerbated by the fact that they are already naturally looking to separate from their parents. Sometimes it makes them feel like they can never do anything right in your eyes.

Advice: Let them make some mistakes without criticizing. Give them room to breathe. For every criticism, give them several things about them that make you proud.

4. They feel as though you haven't followed through. It is a

huge let down when promises are made and not kept. When it becomes a pattern, you become untrustworthy and undependable. It hurts and they put up walls to protect themselves from the constant let down.

Advice: Apologize for past let downs. Moving forward keep your promises. Always follow through. Win them back one kept promise at a time.

5. They feel like you cause instability. The teenage years bring so many changes it is unsettling. The range of changes covers a broad spectrum from the body to feelings and friendships. It's a time of great feelings of instability—internally and externally. If their home is a place of heaviness and stress, they will desire to be somewhere else. This is not meant to be an indictment; it's just the unfortunate reality. The things that cause instability at home would be marital difficulty, substance abuse, anger issues, and physical or emotional abuse.

Advice: Do your best to make the home a stable place. Most of these issues can be avoided. If there is abuse, seek professional help. Marital difficulty can be hard to avoid. Seek counseling to help navigate the waters.

Have you ever been shut out by your teen? What are you doing to remedy the situation?

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