

How to Stay Joined at the Hip and Heart With Your Teen

I've learned a lot from my wife, Susan. One thing she's taught me is how to maintain a "heart relationship" with each of our children—a deep, enduring relationship that beats strong through the transitional teen years. Here are a few lessons I've learned.

1. Don't take it personally. "Why doesn't she want to hold my hand?" "Why would she rather go to the mall than go bike riding with me?" "Why would he rather stay home with friends than go on vacation with us?" Those are just a few of the questions that swirled in my mind and flowed through my wounded heart as we ushered in the teen years. So I searched for answers, and Susan gave me one. "Don't take it personally," she said to me. "And, don't try to force anything. Give them some space. They'll come around."

I knew she was right, but I didn't take her advice at first, which led to my kids telling Susan that I was "smothering" them, and that made them not want to hang out with me as much. So I backed off a bit. The result? I found that they wanted to do a bit more with me. These 5 reasons why your teen is rebelling may help you to better understand your teen as well.

2. Always speak the truth. No matter what, my children know that I will always speak the truth to them. If they ask me a question, they will get the truth. They can trust what I say because of my track record over time. Consistent truth-telling is key to staying connected relationally. As you speak the truth into your child's life, it's also important for you to know how to tackle tough topics with your teen.

3. Always do what's in their best interest. On many occasions, I have sat down with my children and advised them on someone

or something they should avoid—a bad relationship, a questionable movie, an inappropriate party or someone or something they should embrace—a new opportunity, a good event or a faithful friend. When I do so, I often preface my comments with something like, “You know that I am saying this because I have your best interests at heart. And I want you to help you avoid pain and prosper in life.”

4. Broaden the boundaries. Creating boundaries for your kids is essential. But rules and consequences for breaking those rules should change based on age, trust, maturity and responsibility. As our children demonstrate responsibility by staying within the boundaries consistently and as they grow in age and maturity and earn our trust, the rules and consequences should become fewer and our children should have more freedom to make decisions. In other words, the boundaries of their “playing court” will become larger and larger.

5. Find one thing. During those teen years, I’ve learned that finding that “one thing” is important—one big deal. It’s that one thing they like to do and will do with you. For Megan, it’s shopping. For Emily, it’s soup and salad at a nearby restaurant and then an old movie together. For Marky, it’s hunting. For Hannah, it’s jogging. For Grant, it’s camping.

6. Embrace technology. Just like many other things in life, technology can be an enemy or an ally. It can be used for good or evil. With five children ages 17-23, Susan and I have found that technology gives us some common ground for communicating. For example, we each send a good-night text to our girls who are in college or working almost every night. Often, it’s simply a “‘Night, love you soooo much.” Susan and I will have Facetime with our girls away at school. All of us use Instagram, so sharing pictures is often a nice way to catch up as well.

7. Get out of town. Plan something periodically with your child that takes you both away from familiar distractions and

allows you to be one on one. Your teen may very well resist, but try to make it so appealing they can't refuse. Make sure it's not just something *you'd* like to do, but rather something they'd want to do too. Whether it's a shopping trip, fishing trip or just a fun road trip, give your teen the opportunity to breathe a little easier when they're with you. That means, don't lecture during your time together; just listen and hopefully laugh.

8. Ask. Periodically ask your child questions such as, "How am I doing as a dad?" and "What can I do better as a father?" Ask your child's mother the same questions, then take note of their suggestions. If you don't like their answer, make sure you don't react in a negative way; just thank them for their candidness.

9. Don't give up. As a parent, you must walk with your child through the good times and the difficult times. Encourage them in the right way every opportunity you get because, as I've shared before, there are 4 wrong ways parents encourage their kids. Never give up on your child, no matter what your child does or says. Let them know you love them no matter what and that your relationship is all-important. And remember: Being a parent is a lifetime commitment.

What are other things we can do to stay joined at the hip and heart with our teens? Please share your comments.

For the original article, visit . Mark Merrill is the president of Family First.