

How to Tackle Tough Topics With Your Teen

How do you tackle tough topics with your teen? Having gone through the teen years with five kids, I've found there are a lot of difficult topics that parents and teens have to navigate together.

Talking about alcohol, drugs, pornography, premarital sex and many other issues can be very uncomfortable, but very necessary. So, what should a parent do?

First, share with them right up front that you realize this is difficult to talk about but that it's too important to ignore. Tell them this is just a private conversation between the two of you and that you won't share it with anyone else. Also, let them know that your parents didn't talk to you about these things and you wish they had. Or that they did talk to you and you want to make sure they, too, have this benefit.

Second, let them know that you love them no matter what. They need to know there is absolutely nothing they can do or say that will ever take away your love for them. Now, if they do share something with you at some point that is shocking or disturbing, remember your commitment to love them through it.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't express sadness or disappointment over it or discipline them; it just means that you shouldn't go ballistic with shouting or mean or angry words, or withhold your affections from them.

Third, tell them the reason you are talking to them about this—the reason you will or will not allow something—is that you want what's best for them, that you always have their best interests at heart. It's important for them to understand you will do anything if it will help them—that you'd even take a

bullet and die for them, if necessary.

Fourth, let them know the decisions they make will ultimately be theirs but that those decisions will have consequences. Some will be natural consequences; others will be imposed consequences. Make sure you clearly lay out what those consequences will be. In some cases, it may even help to write out what they are in a written contract that your teen signs.

Fifth, let them know that you have always, and will always, speak the truth to them and that you expect them to always speak the truth to you, even if it hurts. Your relationship must be built on a foundation of truth.

Sixth, let them know that you are always there for them no matter what they say or do.

If you've had to talk to your teenagers about tough topics, I'd love to hear your thoughts and ideas on what worked. Or what didn't. Please comment below.

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