



# Youth Tips for Parents: How to Talk to Your Teenager About Their Mental Health

Many parents may find it difficult to talk to their teenager. It can be even more of a challenge when the teen has a mental health or behavior challenge. The following suggestions are written by teens who are members of PACER's Youth Advisory Board on Mental Health.

## Tips for engaging your child

- **Ask me if it is a good time to talk.** I may want to talk with you immediately when something is on my mind, or I may only share when there aren't any other distractions and it's just you and me.
- **Listen** to what I say without speaking or interrupting. Sometimes it is hard enough to talk about certain things interrupting me might discourage me from sharing.
- **Show you are interested** by looking me in the eye with real empathy. If I avoid eye contact, please understand it is just hard for me sometimes.
- Sometimes I would rather write you a letter than talk. **Allow me to choose my way to communicate.**
- **Be patient with me.** Sometimes I just can't follow or find the words; be ready to repeat your questions or statements if I ask you to.
- **Be calm.** I may be feeling emotions I can't control; being calm will help me.
- My mental health struggles are real. **Validate my feelings.** Let me know I am important to you and that you are here for me.
- **Give me time and space and allow me to approach you** when I am ready to talk.
- When I am struggling in school, **ask me about it in an understanding and calm way.** I am most likely already feeling bad about it.
- Make sure you **praise me** when appropriate. Otherwise I may think the only time you want to talk is when I have done something you don't like.
- I may not always be comfortable talking with you. If appropriate, **allow me to talk to another trusted adult** to get help.
- Recognize that I have **my own skills, talents, and ideas.**
- **Speak to me in a gentle manner.** When you yell or swear it hurts me, and I may act out or not talk to you.
- **Realize** that you don't always need to have the last word.

*(Resources for parents on reverse side.)*

## **Resources for parents**

---

[PACER.org](https://www.pacer.org)

PACER provides individual support, advocacy, and education for children and youth with mental health and emotional or behavioral disorders through its website, [PACER.org/cmh](https://www.pacer.org/cmh).

In addition, PACER staff facilitate a Youth Advisory Board focused on advocacy for youth with mental health and behavioral challenges. For more information, call PACER at (952) 838-9000.

## **Additional Handouts**

---

Tips for Talking to Youth Who are Under Stress

[PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c234.pdf](https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c234.pdf)

Encourage Your Child's Positive Behavior and School Success: Creating a Home Plan with Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

[PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c218a.pdf](https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c218a.pdf)

Sample PBIS Home Plan

[PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c218b.pdf](https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c218b.pdf)