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Your Teenager's Mind

Take the time to listen to your teenager.

Being a teenager is hard. Listen to your teenager. And try to remember how you felt when you were that age.

Take time to talk and really listen to your teen.

During the teenage years, you and your teen will have a lot to talk about. Communicate with her in the way she feels most comfortable:

If your child signs

- Learn more signs — for feelings, getting along with others, about things you believe in. You can look up signs on the [American Sign Language Browser website](http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm) (<http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm>)
- Ask your child to teach you some of these signs.



If your child speaks

- Take time to sit down with your teenager and talk. Just the 2 of you.
- Always face your teen when you're talking to her.
- Talk in a place where your teen can see your face.
- Repeat things your teenager might have missed.

For more tips, read our page on [communicating with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/tips/deaf.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/tips/deaf.jsp>).

Teenagers start to think differently.

Children often think **concretely**, or about things they can see and touch. When they become teenagers, they start to think **abstractly**, or about things that they can't see and touch.

Some people think that even when they become teenagers, deaf children still think concretely. That may be because the people around them don't sign well enough. Or maybe because they don't take the time to explain inside feelings and thoughts.

Explain abstract things, like feelings, to your child.

By the time your child becomes a teenager, she should know more words about feelings than "happy," "sad" and "mad." Having language gives meaning to what your child is feeling inside. It can also help her control her feelings.

Explain the difference between feelings that seem alike:

- Boredom and sadness
- Laziness and tiredness
- Sadness and depression

Read our pages on [depression](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/>) to see what depression can look like in deaf teens.

Sometimes, when teens feel bad, they use drugs or alcohol to dull their feelings. Read more about this on our page called [Depressed Teens Take More Risks](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/risks.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/special/depression/risks.jsp>).

Ask your teen the "big" questions in life.

Ask your teen questions that need a fuller answer than "yes" or "no."

Try some of these questions:

- Why do you feel the way you do?
- What do you think are your strengths?
- What do you want to do in life?
- What kind of person would you like to spend your life with?

Listen to what your child says. This will help you see how she thinks and solves problems.

Help your teenager to accept herself just as she is.

Teenagers with hearing loss may find it hard to accept themselves. Many teens say they'd rather be hearing. But this is not a real choice for them. So teenagers need to learn to love themselves just as they are.

Show your teen that she can be proud of herself:

- Point out talents in art, sports or anything else she's good at.
- Praise her when she brings home artwork, good grades or other things.

Teens who are hard of hearing or have changing hearing loss

Accepting themselves may be even harder for hard of hearing teens. It may be harder for teenagers whose hearing loss changes, or have **fluctuating (FLUK-chew-ATE-ing)** hearing loss. Why?

- Hard of hearing teens may hear most of what people say. But they may miss important details. So they're not deaf, but they're also not hearing. Where do they fit in?
- Teens with fluctuating hearing may hear fine 1 day. But they next day, they can't understand what anyone's saying. This is confusing to them and everyone around them. And it makes it hard for them to get used to 1 kind of hearing loss.

Help your teenager learn to take care of herself.

Growing up means learning to take charge of your own life. Help your teen plan for the future. Planning helps your teen see that she is in control.

Walk your teenager through the steps she has to take to get what she wants. For example, getting a driver's license:

1. Take the written test to get a learner's permit
2. Learn to drive safely
3. Take the driving test to get a driver's license

After she gets her driver's license:

- Get insurance for her to drive
- Decide when she can use the car
- Learn to drive safely

But don't stop there. Talk to your child about what kinds of things might happen when she's driving:

- What to do if she's in an accident
- What to do if her friend wants to drive the car
- What to do if she's driving, and her friend tells her to drive faster

Expect to fight with your teenager about who's boss.

Your teenager is growing and learning. She will also test your limits to see what she can and can't do.

It's frustrating to fight with your teenager all the time. But your teenager is learning about control, and getting what she wants. Use each chance to help your teen learn:

- How to argue for what she wants or believes in
- How to give and take to get what she wants

Learn more about your teenager's mind

- Visit the [Talking with Kids About Tough Issues](http://www.talkingwithkids.org/) (<http://www.talkingwithkids.org/>) website.
- Read [Teenage Growth and Development: 15-17 Years Old](http://www.talkingwithkids.org/) (<http://www.talkingwithkids.org/>).
- Read [Understanding Adolescence: The Tasks](http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/ui358.pdf) (<http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/freepubs/pdfs/ui358.pdf>).
- Read these other [articles on raising teenagers](http://www.parenting.org/flight/index.asp) (<http://www.parenting.org/flight/index.asp>).

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/growingup/teen/mind.jsp>