

# Tips for helping teenagers

## CHEVALIER COLLEGE

BY SARAH MANGELSDORF

COLLEGE counsellor at Chevalier College, Sarah Mangelsdorf has some advice on how parents can better communicate with their teens.

Especially during times such as these, when dependency and change can unsettle many a family and their children.

### "Communicating with your teen: Five tips for helping our teenagers feel heard and look forward with hope"

In this Covid era, I find myself as a counsellor and parent of a teen straddling two worlds - school and home.

Of late, these have merged - somewhere between collective chaos and 'we can't change what's going on, but let's get on with things anyway'.

Yet out of the chaos has come such goodness and parents are noticing the resilience and adaptability of their children.

I oscillate between being in awe of my children; and

## GREAT TIPS

- Remember, as parents, we are there to be SILENT first, then LISTEN (same letters).
- Give your teen the opportunity to be the most mature version of themselves
- Focus on the good
- Give them a chance to speak
- Dive into joys that make life meaningful

of the mess they can create. It takes quite a few deep breaths to acknowledge where we all are at and appreciate what strengths our children have to manage all that has been thrown at them.

Below are some tips for communicating with our teens during this time of increased uncertainty.

### #1 Listen

We are all capable of doing and saying unkind things when we are hungry, angry, tired, hurt. Remember, as parents, we are there to be SILENT first, then LISTEN



**RESILIENCE:** Last year Chevalier College students gathered to recognise RUOK day. Photo: Supplied.

(same letters). Listen to the meaning behind what your teen is saying, try not to listen to reply and solve. Whilst some of the things your teen might say may not be easy to hear, it is not our role as parents to go in straight away and throw solutions at them. Listen first, empathise, offer problem solving and be ready for the offer to be accepted - or not!

### #2 The side of the teen you talk to is the teen that shows up for the conversation

Adolescent psychologist

Dr Lisa Damour aptly reminds us that all teens can have a lazy on-the-lounge side - an impulsive push-back side. Yet all teens have a thoughtful, philosophical, mature, problem-solving, invested-in-their-own-growth side. Give your teen the opportunity to be the most mature version of themselves by addressing this side, rather than making assumptions that they are incapable of being anything other than an impetuous teenager.

### #3 Find and highlight the benefits

Benefit finding refers to the silver linings, the snippets of joy, the things we notice that we have learnt out of adversity. What you focus on grows! When we hone in on the negatives in our family - community, nation and world - we find them and they will exponentially grow. Switch that around and focus on the good. The good in our children, our family, our community. You can choose what you want to grow.

### #4 Is it a conversation or a directive?

Ask yourself, are you hav-

ing a conversation with your teen or are you speaking in questions and directives? Where is your...? Come on, pick up...? What time will you...? Whose turn is it to...? Have you got your...? Give your teenager a chance to speak, rather than feel interrogated.

### #5 Spot the strengths

Strengths spotting helps us to focus on what works for us - how we access our internal resources to deal with struggles, and dive into the joys and connections that make life meaningful. To recognise our own strengths and then spot strengths in others. Surveys such as VIA Character Strengths highlight the value of strengths focused individuals making a difference in our community.

Strengths-based parenting models such as Prof. Lea Waters' "The Strength Switch" help parents to turn towards our children's strengths rather than fixing their weaknesses.

I encourage you to dive into what strengths you all have in your family.



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