

CAN WE TALK?

with Charis Denison and a panel of six Bay Area high school teenagers (11/12/14)

Notes provided by Parent Education Committee

This presentation was an open-ended conversation in which teenagers share about their lives, challenges, desires and wishes about their parents and relationships.

Below are some notes and “aha!” moments:

- Support your children to make decisions on how to do their homework, what to eat, where to eat, where to sit in the car, etc. so they can continue making decisions on their own when they are teenagers. This will teach them to practice their voice and how to stand up for themselves when they need to make crucial decisions later on.
- Teenagers like it when parents create boundaries. For example: curfews for time to go to sleep, to come back home, etc. They want it. One teen noted that she felt uncomfortable and vulnerable to peers taking advantage of her situation, when her parents placed too much trust and responsibility on her (e.g., parents going away for the weekend leaving her home alone with no curfew).
- Teenagers want to feel the empathy & respect from parents as to how hard they work; understanding that it is not easy to be a teen and that they have a lot going on; instead of hearing “you have it so easy!” Parents don’t always appreciate how hard their life is. Not just grades, but socially as well. Their entire process is all encompassing and non-stop.
- Teenagers want to have a balance between being able to be and being checked in on.
- Teenagers said that it is never too soon to speak about drinking. Don’t make drugs and sex the worst things in life, because teenagers will want to do it. Start the dialogue early and keep it open minded.
- Charis Denison mentioned that you want your teenager to have someone they can talk to about “these things” (drinking, sex, drugs, etc..). It does not have to be the parent, but make sure they have SOMEONE.
- Talk to your children like the people you want them to become. Charis said, “For every bad choice a teen makes, they make 15 choices that are excellent!”
- Teaching teens to make choices in tricky situations is important. Not making a choice, is making a choice.
- She asked us: Whose needs are you serving when you request something from your child? This particularly relates to times when we are trying to gather information from them about their lives.

- Making non-tech time available to connect with your children. Put down your phone and/or gadget and really connect with and hear your child. Make an effort to be accessible to your teen at predictable times/places in the house.
- Monitor the proportion of you talking to your teen talking – talk much much less.
- Set and be the example when it comes to alcohol. Do not speak about “needing a drink” because you’ve had a bad day, for example. In this scenario, your teen hears that it’s okay to self medicate with alcohol. Teens noted that positive associations with alcohol can be beneficial (e.g., as part of a family gathering or dinner, not as self medication).
- Regarding texting, ask your kids, “would you say it in person?” In other words, teach kids not to text something they wouldn’t say to that person’s face.
- In closing, Charis asked the panel of teenagers what they would like to hear more of from their parents? They said:
 - “I’m proud of you”
 - “You succeed in ways that matter to me”
 - “It’s okay to cut yourself some slack”
 - “I apologize”
 - “You are beautiful”
 - “What you love is great”