

Breaking Through the Walls of Teenagers

It was a beautiful Friday night for high school football. I was in my mid-twenties and just started volunteering with an organization called Young Life. It is an outreach to teenagers. I sat in my car as the game was beginning and I was scared out of my mind. My assignment was to go into the game and befriend some teenagers. I knew a couple already, but not many. I fought the urge to go home and went in. Immediately I saw Brad, a sarcastic sophomore. We hadn't seen each other since camp that summer. I was so relieved as we started talking. He was with a group I didn't know. Just as our conversation wore down and I anticipated him introducing me to his friends, he turned his back on me. All of sudden I was standing on the outside of a closed-off group feeling like an idiot.

I love teenagers. They can be breathtakingly frustrating, full of energy, wonderfully fun, and engaging. When kids are young they will tell their parents everything, but when they enter their teen years the walls go up. It's tough. They can be stand-offish and isolate themselves in their room putting parents of teens in a difficult position. After spending 16 years and having tons of conversations with teens, there are things I learned to break through teenager walls. Here are 6

ways to do it.

1. You Need To Know That You Don't Know.

You don't know what it's like to be them. [Being a teenager is not the same today as it was when you were in high school.](#)

They are bombarded with burdens we were lucky to avoid. Technology gives them access to knowledge that is as much a curse as it is a blessing. They have access to things they don't have the maturity to handle. Expectations from society, the educational system, coaches, and parents run them ragged. They are exhausted, stressed out, and have little-to-no down time.

2. Be Present.

This is really simple. The more you are there, the more opportunities you will have to talk. Step into their world as best you can. Take an interest in the things they are doing, especially if it seems like a mystery to you. Support them at their games, activities, and performances. Go to games and events they go to even if their own involvement is as a spectator. Give them space, but observe the sights and sounds they live. It's important to breathe in the aroma of their life. It will help you speak their language.

"This is really simple. The

3. Play.

Do things the two of you like to do together or figure out what they like to do and do it with them. *more you're there, the more opportunities you will have to talk."*

If you don't know how to do it, let them teach you. Letting them teach you something they're good at is like depositing money at the relationship bank. It shows you care and gives them confidence. Let them invite their friends if they want. Don't underestimate the power of play. You won't believe how many doors it opens.

4. Talk When They Are Ready to Talk.

Teenagers decide to talk at the weirdest times. [Be ready because it will happen when you least expect it.](#) You will [ask them questions](#) all night and receive one word answers. Just as you lay down at midnight exhausted they show up at your door and unload. Dive in when they open up or you will miss your chance.

5. One-on-One.

Making them the sole focus sets the table for them to share. Pick a place where they feel comfortable and safe. Try to think of places where they would want to be for an extended period of time. Avoid places where they feel like someone could overhear the things they say.

6. The Art of Questions and Discernment.

Stay away from yes/no questions because they will feel like they are being interrogated. Use open-ended questions. Develop the art of leading them down a path with your questions. If you do it right, they will start sharing deep things naturally without realizing it. Think of it like slowly cooking a turkey. Going right for the jugular (the deep question) right off the bat more than likely will get them to shut down, particularly when you haven't been present or played. Be patient. [Listen carefully to their answers.](#) There can be significant meaning in things that a non-discerning ear would let pass by. One word answers, tones, and body language all come floating out of them like prayer requests. Elevate your senses so you don't miss them.