

Five ways to get teens to listen

Getting on the same page with young people is a challenge for many parents. Often they'll listen to their friends, and even their friends' parents, before they listen to their own parents.

Here are five very different approaches to use so your young person will listen to you:

1. Swap you for them.

If they are more likely to listen to their uncle or aunty than you, then draw them into important conversations. “I think your Uncle/Aunty/other esteemed adult would tell you that you should be very careful when you go a party in that part of town.” Bringing others in to the act spreads the authority around and makes it easier for them to take your messages on board.

2. Swap verbal for visual.

Avoid arguments. Want your daughter to go to her room? Say “Jessica” and point your palm toward their bedroom, while looking away or looking down to avoid eye contact. This visual message prevents arguments. NB: There’s a beautiful example of going visual rather than verbal when a teenager came home late from a party on another of my blog posts.

3. Swap fast for slow.

Teens often want you to make quick decisions in their favour. Slow down the conversation. “I need to think about that. I’ll get back to you about that later.” Add a time factor when you talk with teenagers, and don’t let them force you to make snap decisions.

4. Swap them for you.

Control is a big issue for young people. Let them think they are calling the shots by swapping ‘them’ for you when ‘you’ give instructions. Rather than

'Clean your room now!' try 'I'll go into your bedroom (to put your washing away) when it's tidy.' Tell them what you'll do, rather than what they should do.

5. Swap pointer for palms.

Lose the habit of pointing your finger at a young person out of frustration. It only threatens their need to feel in control. If you point to the bin indicating that it's their job to clean it, use an open palm. It's non-threatening and still gets your message across. Avoid wagging your finger in their direction when you are frustrated. They'll either fight you (verbally) or flee the room!

Choose your words and your non-verbals carefully when you communicate with young people. Get them right and they are more likely to listen and take your ideas on board. Try one or two of these ideas and practise them during the week, and see the impact that these changes have.