

# Understanding the Teenage Brain Communication



watch the video here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPKFzWHi1ro>

**This film is about communication between teenagers and parents and carers.**

Here are the main topics covered:

## Why communication matters

- Why good communication makes a difference
- What teenagers say about communication
- What parents and carers say about communication

## Why things can go wrong

- The problem of silence and grunting
- How breakdown leads to conflict and anger
- What do teenagers actually want?

## Some key things about communication

- Filters
- The power balance
- Information management
- Communication is a skill – adults may be better at it

## How to get to a better place

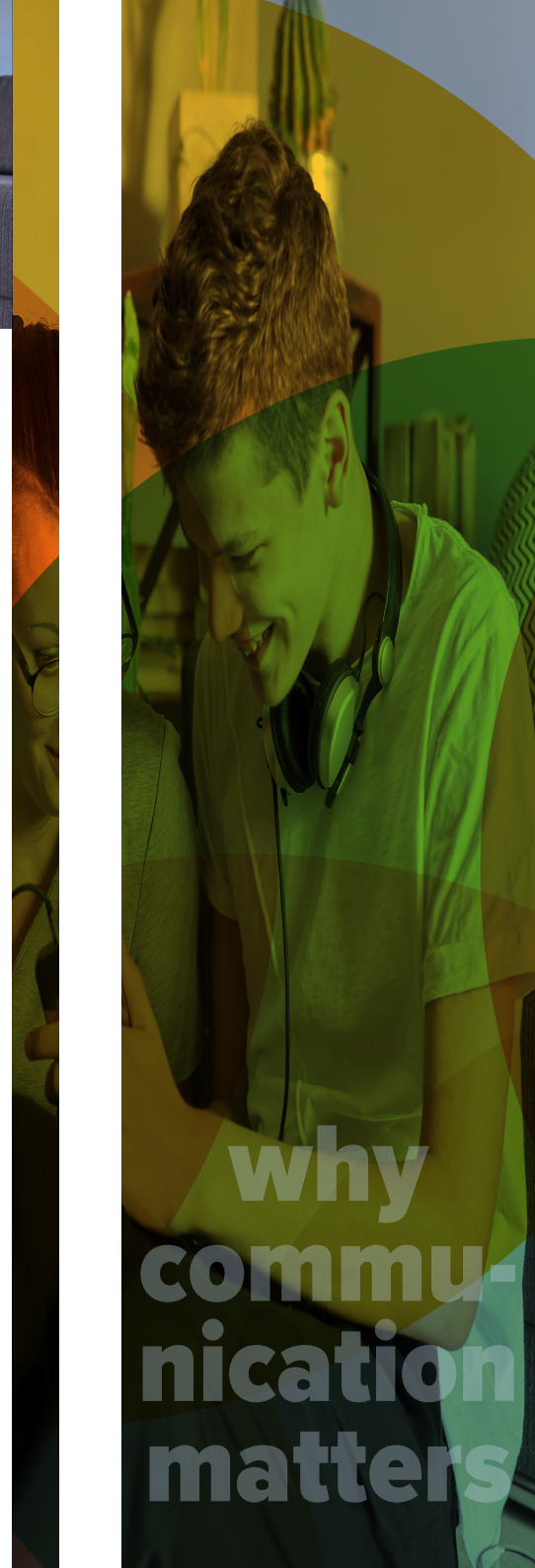
- Two-way communication
- Repair when things have gone wrong
- Learning about good communication



## Why communication matters



Communication is at the heart of good relationships. However, it is a sad fact that, so often, communication breaks down between adults and young people. Each side wants different things. Adults want to have as much information as possible about what the teenager is doing. On the other hand, the young person wants privacy and the option to talk when it feels safe and convenient. Teenagers say that parents are either nagging or interrogating. Parents say that teenagers are unresponsive and hold information back.



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## Why things can go wrong



Each side sees the picture from a different angle. The key thing is that young people are going through a new stage of life, when a lot is changing for them. Because of the changes associated with puberty, and the resulting changes to the physical self, many teenagers experience uncertainty and confusion about their identity. This leads to an understandable hesitancy about talking and sharing these complicated feelings. On the other hand, this stage causes a lot of anxiety for adults. Because things are changing, parents worry about what is happening to their daughters and sons. What are they doing with their friends, or what is happening when they are on-line? This anxiety is completely understandable, but it can lead to parents coming across as nosy and inquisitive about what the teenager thinks should be private.

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## Some key things about communication



The more we understand about communication, the better. The key thing here is that the other person does not always hear the actual words that come out of your mouth. Communication involves a process of filters. With teenagers those filters involve assumptions about what the parent is trying to do. Is the communication actually expressing the power relationship? Is what is being said reflecting that the parent thinks she/he knows best? And for the parent, is the reluctance of the teenager to share things just reflecting obstinacy or a bad mood?

From research we have learnt about what is called information management. This is something we all do. This involves deciding what to tell, and what to hold back. When the young person is holding back, the assumption may be that this is just a deliberate ploy to get at the parent. However, this may not be the case. Research shows us that teenagers hold back information for many reasons. These reasons may include not wanting to worry or upset the parent. Information management helps us to see that many factors influence the way communication plays out between adult and young person.

The last thing to note here is that communication is a skill. Teenagers may appear to be good communicators with their friends, but with adults they may feel inferior in their skills to express themselves. Young people may appear to hold back, not because they don't want to talk, but because they believe they are not as good as adults at finding the right words. It is important for adults to recognize this, and find ways to help young people to feel confident about what they communicate, and how they do it.

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## How to get to a better place



The first thing to recognize is that teenagers do want to talk, but they want to talk at times that feel right for them, and in places where they feel safe to express themselves. Adults should, if possible, take this into account, even if this involves listening at times that are inconvenient. Perhaps the most important way to improve things is to recognize that good communication is a two-way process. There should be as much listening as talking.

When young people are asked about communication they will usually say that adults talk at them. This is one-way communication. If we want to improve communication, we have to be willing to listen – to really listen to what teenagers have to say. This is two-way communication. It may be useful to think about the question -whose agenda is it?

For good communication to take place, both sides have to believe that their concerns are being addressed. For teenagers this is especially important, as they so often feel that they are being ignored or not taken seriously.

To conclude, there are ways in which communication between adults and teenagers can be improved or repaired. If we want to contribute to better relationships between the generations, we need to recognize that two-way communication is a necessary feature of this process. We also need to take into account the particular needs of this stage, as young people move through this transition and adapt to the changes that are taking place in their bodies and in their identities.

how to  
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## TOP TIPS

**Don't force the talk**

**Choose a time that is good for the young person**

**Respect the teenager's need for privacy**

**Remember  
– your agenda may not be the same as that of the young person**

**Most important  
– be prepared to listen.**



## Where to find further information

### Websites

Family Links ([www.familylinks.org.uk](http://www.familylinks.org.uk))

A training organization with programmes for parents of teenagers

Family Lives ([www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk))

An organization with a helpline, and a website with lots of information for families

### Further reading

*“Why won’t my teenager talk to me?”*

John Coleman. Routledge.

*“What’s my teenager thinking?”*

Tanith Carey. Penguin Random House.

*“How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk”* Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

Templar Publishing.