

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator



Five ideas to get young people to listen

When talking to young people it's the little things you do and say that make the biggest difference

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 that will encourage your young people to listen you:

1. Swap 'you' for 'them'

If your son or daughter is more likely to listen to their uncle or aunty than you, then it makes sense to 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. It's also a great way to get around a young person's natural defensiveness and suspicion that their parents exist only to spoil their fun.

2. Swap 'verbal' for 'visual'

Many teenagers just love a good argument, and who better to argue with than their parents? One way to minimise arguments is to use as few words as possible when giving directions.

Want your daughter to go to her room? Try saying your daughter's name and point your palm toward her bedroom, while looking away or looking down to avoid eye contact. Indicate what you want done, as well as your unwillingness to engage in verbal banter.

3. Swap 'fast' for 'slow'

Teens are adept at the verbal ambush. That is, they'll often ask their parents for permission to go out, using the tightest timeframe imaginable. They also do so just as they are heading out the door to school. Quick decisions are usually made in their favour.

When you feel as if you've been ambushed, slow the conversation down, rather than reply straight away. "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. Instead of ordering "Clean your room now!" try saying "I'll go into your bedroom (to put your washing away) when it's tidy." In other words, 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!

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.



Michael is an ambassador for the Federal Government's 'Swap It' healthy lifestyles campaign. Visit the swapit.gov.au website for some fantastic healthy lifestyle ideas.