Getting your teens to talk

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2015
Agenda

- Welcome and logistics
- Introductions
- Overview of OEOP
- “Getting your teens to talk” presentation
- Discussion and wrap-up
- Preview of next webinar
Introductions
Overview of OEOP
Our vision, mission, and values

Vision
Making science and engineering careers accessible to all

Mission
To diversify the science and engineering community by serving students from underrepresented and underserved backgrounds and empowering these students to develop the skills and confidence needed to pursue careers in technical fields

Values
Learning, diversity, transformation, access, and community
Our programs

MITES
Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science

E2@MIT
Engineering Experience at MIT

MOSTEC
MIT Online Science, Technology, and Engineering Community

SEED Academy
Saturday Engineering Enrichment and Discovery Academy

STEM Program
Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Program
Getting your teens to talk

Facilitated by Charmain F. Jackman, Ph.D.
Getting Your Teens to Talk

Facilitator:
Charmain F. Jackman, Ph.D.
Innovative Psychological Services

December 8, 2015
Agenda

- Welcome
- Objectives
- Overview of Adolescent Development
- Obstacles to Positive Communication
- Strategies for Improving Communication
- Q & A
Objectives

You will:

• Increase your knowledge of adolescent development

• Understand the obstacles to positive communication between parents & adolescents

• Learn at least two strategies that you can use immediately to improve communication with your adolescent
Overview: Adolescent Development

Erickson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development (1959):

• **Identity vs. Role Confusion**
  – Increasing independence from family
  – More reliance on friendships
  – Trying on different identities (Who am I?)
  – Career exploration (What will be my role?)
  – Making big decisions (What do I want from life?)
Inside the Adolescent Brain

The Average Teenage Brain
Normal Adolescent Concerns

- Relationships
- Friendships
- Puberty
- Sex
- Fitting In
- Sleep
- Organization
- Self-Esteem
- Appearance

- Identity
  - Racial/ethnic identity
  - Gender
  - Sexual orientation
  - Body Image

- Emotional Regulation
  - Irritability
  - Moody/mood swings
  - Defiant behavior

- Academic Performance
- College/Career
Serious Adolescent Concerns

- Self-Injurious Behavior: cutting; burning; scratching
- Mood disorders (e.g., depression; bipolar)
- Suicide Thoughts/Gestures
- Abuse/Neglect
- Family Conflict
- Unwanted Sexual Experiences/Risky Sexual Practices
- Unhealthy Romantic relationships
- Substance Abuse/Dependence
- School Failure
- Homicidal Thoughts
- Violent Anger/Aggression
Warning Signs of Depression

Symptoms:
• Mood (sadness, or anger, feeling “empty”)
• Feelings of hopelessness or guilt
• Weight gain or weight loss
• Change in sleep patterns
• Trouble concentrating or focusing
• Low motivation
• Withdrawing from friends/activities; Loss of interest in hobbies
• Frequent thoughts about death (e.g., suicidal thoughts or gestures)
• Impacts school performance
• Missing school/being late

Warning Signs of Anxiety

**Symptoms:**
- Frequently stomach concerns
- Avoidance (e.g., school, activities, leaving home)
- Panic attacks
- Trouble concentrating or focusing
- Frequent visits to the school nurse
- Excessive worry/Worries about bad things happening
- Rituals
- Sleep disruption
- Scratching; pulling hair; biting nails
- Easily overwhelmed
# Adolescent Coping Strategies

**Healthy Strategies**

- Talking to friends
- Talking to a parent or other adult
- Updating social media status
- Listening to music
- Expressing through art
- Focusing on goals
- Using relaxation strategies
- Sleeping/Eating well

**Unhealthy Strategies**

- Shutting down/Not talking
- Initiating verbal or physical fights
- Updating social media status
- Using/Abusing alcohol/drugs
- Thinking about harming self (e.g., cutting)
- Thinking killing self/others
- Trying to kill self/others
OBSTACLES TO POSITIVE COMMUNICATION
What Makes Talking to your Teen Difficult?

• Time
  – I work so much; we don’t get to see each other because of our schedules

• Discomfort/Anxiety
  – What do we talk about?

• Teen is not interested in talking
  – Child shuts down whenever I try to talk

• Frustration

• Technology
  – Phones, computers, etc.
What Makes Talking to Parents Difficult?

• Time:
  – I have too much homework/activities’

• Discomfort/Anxiety
  – What do we talk about?

• Trust:
  – Parent may overact or judge me; broken promises

• Parent does not listen

• Disappointing parent/not meeting parent expectations

• Parents just don’t understand
### Example: The College Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teen</th>
<th>Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs your help...for some things</td>
<td>Wants to help with everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May want to manage acceptance/rejection in their own timeframe</td>
<td>Wants to know right away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May want to decide on own</td>
<td>Wants to help with decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What happens to the communication in this scenario?
STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING POSITIVE COMMUNICATION
Why is Talking to Your Teen on a regular basis Important?

• Creates a safe space for them to talk to you
• Increases your connection to each other
• Let’s them know that you care about them
• Keeps you informed about their lives
• Allows you teach them how to solve problems
• Helps them make good choices
• Gives you a chance to share your values (in a non-judgmental way)
Listening Skills

The quieter you become, the more you can hear.
Create a Space to Listen

- Give your child your full attention
  - Focus on the teen
  - Stop what you were doing or set-up a time to talk

- Silence is golden
  - Resist the urge to ask questions or to give your opinion
  - Quiet your thoughts and counter-arguments

- Use encouraging non-verbal behaviors
  - Head nods; look at them; Mmms or uh-huhs

- Paraphrase or summarize to make sure that you understand what they said
Connect, Connect, Connect

• Allow teen to teach you about their lives
• Use open-ended questions
• Learn their lingo
  • Listen to their music
  • Check out their social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) pages
  • Learn more about their friends & meet their friends
• Practice listening skills
• Have a regular family meeting time
• Create a regular Special Time together
**More Strategies for Getting Teens to Talk**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Do</strong></th>
<th><strong>Don’t</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Listen</td>
<td>v Nag/Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allow teen to share his/her point of view</td>
<td>v Criticize/Judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listen to teen’s point of view</td>
<td>v Jump to conclusions without hearing the full story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acknowledge teen’s feelings</td>
<td>v Stop teen from sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Show teen respect</td>
<td>v Get on your soapbox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Value their opinion</td>
<td>v Bring up past mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Share your own feelings/ experiences</td>
<td>v Shame your teen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connect at their level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adjust your Mindset

• Allow them to make mistakes & to learn from mistakes
  – Rescuing is not helpful (does not teach)

• Embrace Flexibility
  – Be willing to compromise/negotiate
  – Be open to new ways of approaching a task

• Reserve the right to take a time-out when upset
  – Better to make decisions when calm & rational

• Reflect on your communication style

• Be open to apologizing
Think about a recent interaction you had with your teen that did not go well:

1. What is one (1) thing that you could have done differently in terms of communication?

2. What is one (1) thing that you would like to try to improve communication?
Finding Special Time

Create one-on-one time with each child

- Create a list of activities together (should be free or low-cost)
- Allow child to pick activity
- Set a day and time every week
- Give your full attention during this time
  - No TV or cell phones.

Homework Activity:

- What you would say to your child (see Sample Script)
- When in your schedule can fit in Special Time?
- List the challenges you face in finding time
- Activities you could do with your teen
Sample Script

I know that lately I have not had much time to spend with you. I apologize for that and I want to do things differently from now on.

I am going to be make some time each week so that we can spend some quality time together. I want you help me come up with things that we can do together. It does not really matter what we do, the most important thing is that we have time together.

What do you think about that?
Summary

- LISTEN
- Communicate that you care and love them, *unconditionally*
- Building communication is an ongoing process
- You have to share too
- It’s never too late to open up communication with your child
- Talk to them about your desire to improve communication and let them know that you will trying out some new things
Q & A
Contact Information

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Next webinar

Financial aid and college affordability
Tuesday, January 5, 2016
8:00 P.M. EST

Presented by Meredith Barnhart
Director of Integrated Communications
Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority