



Door Openers

“Door openers” are open-ended questions that encourage children and teens to talk about whatever is important to them. They are the opposite of closed-ended questions that typically require a simple, brief response such “yes” or “no.” They help to establish rapport, gather information, and increase understanding. Door openers should be used frequently, though not exclusively, in conversation. When asking open-ended questions to a child or teen, be ready and willing to listen to the response.

Examples of door openers:

- What do you think about ___?
- Would you tell me more about ___?
- Could you help me understand ___?
- What are the good things and the less good things about ___?
- What do you think you will lose if you give up ___?
- What have you tried before in this type of situation?
- Do you know what ___ means?
- How do you feel now about ___?
- How do you see things changing as a result of this?
- What do you want to do next?
- What would happen if ___?
- How can we ___?
- What is that like for you?
- Where would you like to begin?

In contrast, door slammers are surefire ways to stop conversations by making children and teens feel that you don’t care about their feelings or thoughts.

Examples of door slammers:

- “We’ll talk about that when you need to know.”
- “You don’t need to know about that.”
- “You’re too young to understand.”
- “That’s none of your business.”
- “Because I said so.”
- “I don’t care what your friends are doing.”

Source: Stanford University’s John W. Gardner Center (2007). Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning.



What Teens Wish They Could Tell Their Parents About Communication

"I would tell them to listen. Teens want nothing more than to have their ideas and be heard and judged with an unbiased opinion of one's own emotions." -11th grade girl

"I communicate better with teens because they understand me better. It's easier to connect with teens because we are the same age and they can relate to anything I'm going through. Sometimes I think parents forget what it's like to be a teen." -8th grade girl

"It's hard for parents to relate to teen because teens aren't willing to be open with their parents and teachers and that if parents want to communicate better with teens, they should earn their trust to talk about all things without judgment and with no punishment, only arms and advice." -11th grade girl

"Parents need to find the balance between friend and dictator in order to be someone who we can not only come to and trust but also respect." -12th grade girl

"Use food." -11th grade boy

"I think something important that parents and teachers should remember is to check their baggage at the door - don't come in with preconceived expectations about what's best for them, what will make them happiest, etc." -10th grade girl

"Parents should try to be more Type B people than Type A people. Teenagers (boys) respond to questions more than demands, like to be asked rather than told. We like not to be in such a rush and make things more relaxed." -11th grade boy

"I would say parents and teachers can communicate better with teens if they instill trust in them. There is a balance between being a parent and scolding, but also being a listening ear. Teens don't want to confront their parents about things because they are afraid of judgment. If parents establish right from wrong but understand when a child messes up then I think open communication can happen, it all starts with trust from both sides." -11th grade girl

"I would say that the parent should not only listen to the kid but stop and seriously consider what their teen just said before going off on them again. Because that happens to me a lot." -8th grade girl