

# Checking the Connection: Evaluating Your Parent/Teen Relationship

By: Tricia Propson for the Times Villager-June, 2010

“My parents don’t care about me. They don’t even know me. I am totally alone. Life is just too hard. I don’t want to live.”

This is a consistent message from youth in our area. They repeatedly say they are confused, alone, and hopeless. Most of them want parents and other caring adults to come alongside them, but don’t know how to make that happen. Even teens living in stable homes often misunderstand their parents’ intentions and try to handle the issues they face unsuccessfully on their own.

I recently had some electrical work done on my home. Before the contractor began, he turned off all the electricity. Then he traced each wire from the power source until he found the faulty connection. “You have to know what the problem is before you can fix it,” he said logically.

We need to check the connection we have with our teenagers. We need to understand where the problem is before we can go about the task of making repairs. The epidemic of hopelessness among teenagers is growing in our area. The statistics are true. Those hurting teens may be our own. We have to ask ourselves- “Do I personally believe my teen could be in crisis?” If the answer is yes, then we must, as difficult and painful as it may be, take steps to understand where the faulty connection lies and how we might reconnect it.

Tim Smith, the author of *The Seven Cries of Today’s Teens* says it this way, “We each need to heed the cry of our own teen and seek to meet his need. We do not need to respond to the cries of the kid next door. We do not need to respond to the cries of every troubled teen we see loitering and smoking on the corner. We need to respond to the cries of our own teens.” While it is true that we are called to care for hurting teens around us, we are responsible to connect with our own teens first.

I facilitate a team building exercise with parents and teenagers where we set up a room with a tangled maze of strings. Each parent/teen team takes the end of one string and tries to find the end of their teammate’s string. It is funny to watch but the most interesting thing is how people approach the maze. If the maze gets too difficult, many people give up. Some work together to untangle their strings. Some approach it like a fun

puzzle. Often, the parent will take charge and push their teen aside to handle the task better alone. Some just hunker down and focus on one knot at a time, rarely getting anywhere near the end. How do you think you would approach the string maze with your teen? How do you answer that question may give you some idea as to how you might approach reconnecting with them.

Ask yourself, “What is the maze I face with my teen? Where are we disconnected?” Does your teen struggle with rebellious or destructive behaviors that alienate you? Are you too busy with your own life to spend time looking into theirs? Do you believe you have no right to enter your teen’s world or believe the lie that they don’t need or want you? Are issues from your own past causing you to disconnect because it is too painful? Most teens want a healthy relationship with their parents and most parents want a healthy relationship with their teens.

The American Family Research Council reports conservatively that 20 million kids in the U.S. come home to an empty house. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that the average working father spends less than 3 minutes a day with his child.

But the good news is that our teens are still longing for a connection. Barna Research completed a survey where 78% of teens list their parents as the most influential people in their life and 76% of teenagers say they would like to spend more time with their parents

Most parents think they are connecting with their kids and are often shocked to find out that anything is wrong or that their teens are even struggling. Many are unaware that their teens want to share their life with them. Whatever the connection looks like in your own parent/teen relationship right now, you can take some steps to improve it.

Like the electrical contractor, the first step is to decide if there is a problem that needs fixing. It might be a loose connection that only acts up occasionally, or you may have a serious problem that left alone, will be destructive. The first step is to do a diagnostic overview and decide where to start. Where would your relationship fall in these three types of parent/teen connections?

### Connection Type 1

Parents and/or teens who are in crisis and like to be in crisis; they look for trouble and enjoy being in conflict. It seems they do everything they can to destroy relationships and don't plan to do anything different than that. Most choices are bad choices.

### Connection Type 2

Parents and/or teens who are in crisis and know it, but really don't want to do anything to change it. They may deny anything is wrong, or believe that relating is too much effort so they go with the flow-not trying to make it better and not really caring if it gets worse.

### Connection Type 3

Parents and/or teens who are in crisis but genuinely want to change their situations. The teens and parents who recognize they are hurting, honestly admit it, and want help are the ones who can be helped. These are the relationships that can be reconnected with the most amazing results.

The next step is to decide how drastic the damage is and what you can personally do to repair your connection. Sometimes, professional help is needed. If you think that is the case, seek a professional counselor immediately. Don't wait for things to get better on their own or for tragedy to strike.

Oftentimes, reconnecting can be as simple as committing to spend time with your teen and being willing to face some difficult discussions. Ghandi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." Likewise, you must be the change you want to see in the relationship with your teen.

If parents and teens are willing to honestly evaluate their current situation and commit to reconnecting with one another, we will see healthier and stronger relationships with our teens, in our families, and throughout our communities.

If you are interested in more information about the parent/teen connection program-rekenekt, or other programs available from Cornerstone Communications, please visit: [www.cornerstonecomm.org](http://www.cornerstonecomm.org)

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**Ask yourself these simple "Take 5 to Save Lives" questions. Set aside at least five uninterrupted minutes to check the connection with your teen. If honest communication and trust are issues in your relationship, remember that this may not happen overnight. If your teen is not responsive to your attempts to connect with them, try again. The key is to keep pursuing them until they are honest with you and you understand what you need to do as a parent to make your relationship healthier.**

**1. On a scale from 1-10, 10 being best, how would you honestly rate our relationship?**

**2. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being best, where would you like our relationship to be?**

**3. What is one thing you wish was different about our relationship?**

**4. What is the one thing you wish you could change about me?**

**5. What is one thing we can do to connect more often?**

**To receive a copy of the parent/teen How Well Do I Know You Quiz and other parent/teen resources, please visit: [www.cornerstonecomm.org](http://www.cornerstonecomm.org) and click on rekenekt/ resources or contact.**