

Conversations with your Teen

What Dr Hawkes has created is a roadmap for parents to use. Some of the conversations are easy, not confronting and they won't leave you completely anxiety ridden – at least I hope not! He begins by reminding us of the 4 developmental stages of a growing teen:-

1. **Physical development** – which most of us are confronted with to the extreme when your teen becomes much taller than you remember.
2. **Intellectual development** – Talking to them and realising that the boy you knew is actually not just turning but thinking as a man.
3. **Social and emotional development** – This integral part of your family is still present by a more independent version of his former self and his friends are having more influence on his world. He does still love you though!
4. **Spiritual and moral development** – This child of yours has developed or is developing his own thoughts, feelings and beliefs. This is also where he will start to take ownership of his actions, some take a bit longer than others but they all get there in the end.

As a parent, some of us do not always have the opportunity to see these developmental stages transpire. For some of you there are changes that happen and you feel like, 'He was like this one minute, and the next time I saw him, he had changed'. You are right in thinking those thoughts for often, he has changed. In one way or another, we get to see the transition and ride the ups and downs with him. As exhausting and daunting these changes will be, it reinforces the developmental stages he is experiencing and how he is handling these changes. The good thing is it is completely, and unequivocally a normal part of growing into the physical and emotional body of a man.

So how do we get to the 'talking' stage so it feels normal? Dr Hawkes suggests we breakdown the complexities of 'talking' into 10 areas. Many of these we actually do without even thinking, yet sometimes it's helpful to know how to tackle areas that we struggle to reconcile with our teens.

The following are key areas to help teens develop the ABCDs of mature development;

A = Accountability to self , Family , Community and morals

B = Boundaries with self and others and community

C = Consequences , both positive and negative to ensure responsible action with others and the community

D = Decisions that are wise and self-affirming and good for the family and community

The Conversations should start with the self-awareness and identity of oneself ;

Encouraging your teen to know himself - Letting your teen know who he is and where he is from, who his ancestors are and what is his inheritance. Having a better understanding of what you come from can often help teens' form whom they will become as adults. Share and revel in your history! Talk about his ability to leave a positive legacy .

Helping a teen choose an appropriate moral code – As a parent you have your own ideal, faith and beliefs that you either want to or intuitively you instil these onto your teen. As part of the developmental process, he will question these which is normal. Discussing these beliefs is something we need to do constantly with our teens as this part of their life from 11 years to 18 years is incredibly diverse. As parents, we need to make sure we stand by the moral code of the school and embed this into our everyday life while he is at school or on the playing field.

Assisting your teen to take responsibility – The teens of today are confronted with an adolescence that is worlds apart from the one we knew. They are confronted with too much available information that is accessible far too regularly. Technology has allowed our adolescents to sit back, view and accept what they see rather than confront it. With this unlimited information comes freedom. The teens can access, or find alternate ways to access global information, what they also need to understand and take ownership of is the reality of the increased responsibility and accountability that comes with that. Considering 'technology free' time within your household could be a viable option. If our teens do not understand the responsibility in having such technology then we have failed them. The phrase, "With great power, comes great responsibility" has never been more true than teaching our teens' the accountability that comes with knowledge.

Instructing teens to live within a community – I have already touched on the fact that being part of a community and interacting with others via technology is a reality of 21st Century life. What we do need to do is make sure that our teens do not consider these relationships as 'everything'. Talking, playing, praying, even arguing at times, with people in a face to face conversation is what community is all about. We need to provide our teens with the ability to relate or interact with others in a positive way. We want to raise our teens to know they cannot delete or turn off their 'real' world thus they need to live with those around them for the good and the bad.

Helping a teen to optimise performance – As parents we need to provide them with the skill of coping with change, and when that is achieved we must then provide them with the skill of organising their time. From there we then consider how to provide them with structures to succeed academically. This doesn't always translate into 'A's' but that isn't what should be important. Getting your teen to work to the best of his ability is what true success is.

Encouraging a teen to stay healthy – Teens are inherently risk takers. That is the nature of the gender. We need to make sure that we guide our teens to be teens and take risks (because they are going to, let's face it) but teach them to think before they act. In the boarding house I have always maintained the theory of the 10 second rule. I remind them that stopping, counting to ten then making their choice far outweighs the 'just do it' mentality. We have to keep our teens as safe as we possibly can for as long as we possibly can. Talking to them about stopping and thinking before they act is a mantra for their life.

Helping a teen to deal with grief and loss – Teaching our teens to know that disappointment happens, discouragement happens and distress happens. These are not aspects of life we should shield from them, they are after all a fact of life itself. Reminding them that not winning or not constantly being successful at everything is not a sign of weakness, it's a reality of living. Get used to it as that is what life is all about.

Reference: Ten Conversations you need to have with your Teen Dr Tim Hawkes