

Communication Tip No. 9: Avoid “Scope Creep” With Teens

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“I had a lot of feelings back then,” a friend recently commented when looking back at her teenage journal entries. She’s not the only one. Most teens are dealing with hormone changes that make every situation more dramatic, on top of the challenges of beginning to figure out their own identity and wanting to exert their independence.



In other words, there’s a lot going on with teenagers, which can make it difficult to work through conflict resolution or address particular issues as a parent or caring adult. One reprimand about a curfew can easily become an argument, which can result in the teen becoming upset or resentful about “all of the senseless rules,” and the parent reacting by saying, “you never show any respect.”

During conversations with teens, focusing on the matter at hand is essential. By avoiding “scope creep,” adults can more effectively communicate with teenagers about a particular issue and hopefully encourage them in their journeys toward mature adulthood in the process.

In fact, by sticking to the concrete situation that needs addressing, a teen will often glean lessons beyond the scope of the conversation. For example, if a teen is struggling in school and brings home abysmal grades, yelling about all the possible reasons the teen is “neglecting their work” will only result in strife. However, seeking to understand why the teen is not doing well in school and then supporting them in developing a plan to succeed may give teens the confidence they need to address other problems in the future.

It is tempting to make every dispute an opportunity to discuss multiple issues at the same time, but this is often counterproductive. Instead, by focusing on one issue at a time you are better able to guide and mentor teenagers by helping them look with clear eyes at the situation in front of them and work toward a solution.

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