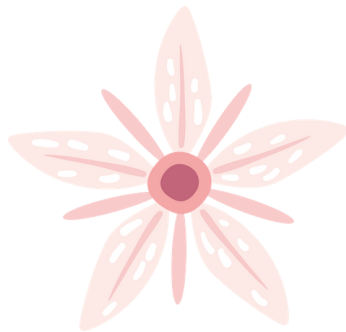


Three Simple Tools

FOR INCREASING CONNECTION
WITH YOUR TEEN



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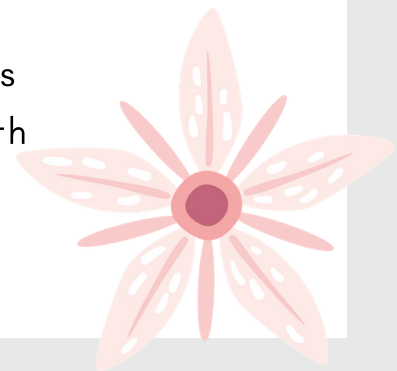
If you're anything like me, you don't get too many opportunities to really talk to your teen. Between work, school, homework, extra-curriculars, friends, and social media there's hardly a moment when you and your teen are free at the same time. And when you do have a chance to catch your breath, the last thing either of you wants is to have a serious conversation.

And yet . . . talking to your teen is the most direct route to connection with your teen. And connection with your teen is the only way to truly understand how they're doing.

If your teen has serious anxiety or depression, it can be even harder for them to open up. Their impulse will be to turn inward, sheltering themselves from the additional stress that comes from talking to a parent who is worried about them.

So . . . I have a few simple tools you can use to open up those lines of communication and talk to your teen.

The beauty of these is that they only take a few seconds and they offer you insights into your teen's mental health and wellness that you might not otherwise get.



1. The Check-In

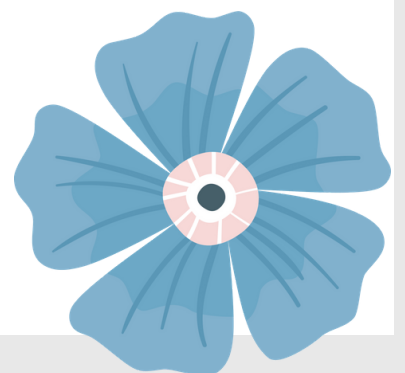
The Check-In is just like it sounds—taking a moment to check in on how you and your teen are feeling at that specific time. When you ask for a check-in, you'll share one or two feelings that describe where you are emotionally in that moment and ask your teen to share one or two feelings as well.

"Good," "OK," "Fine," and similar words are not feelings and they don't count. Pizza is good, OK, or fine, and you and your teen are not pizza.

To get the most out of a Check-in you have to give it your full attention. Stop what you're doing, put your phone down, make eye contact and be thoughtful about the descriptive words you choose. If you model this consistently, your teen will do the same. The emotional connection you'll experience in these small moments will make the time and attention you put in worth every second.

You may agree on a couple of times a day when you'll do a check-in with your teen, or you may do it organically, asking for it when it feels like a good time. Either way, shoot to make it a habit to check in at least once a day.

It's as simple as, "Hey, let's check-in," and then diving in and sharing.



2. The Wellness Scan

The point of the Wellness Scan is to focus on the three areas (mind, body and heart) that impact your wellness moment to moment. You and your teen will share just one word to describe each of these three areas.

Mind (thoughts and cognitions): What are my thoughts right now? Is my mind calm or racing? Are my thoughts positive or negative? Am I worried or at peace? Excited or anxious? Happy or sad?

Body (physical sensations/senses): Am I tense or relaxed? Warm or cold? Feeling strong or weak? Energetic or tired? What do I see, hear or taste that's affecting me right now?

Heart (emotional): Is my heart heavy or light? Joyful or sorrowful? Confident or overwhelmed?

Examples of a quick Wellness Scan might look like:

Mind: Calm

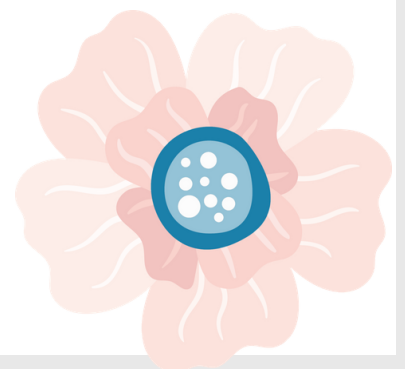
Mind: Worried

Body: Relaxed

Body: Tired

Heart: Light

Heart: Overwhelmed



3. Validation

What do you do if your teen says they are feeling angry, worried, overwhelmed, hurt or any of the other myriad feelings that put parents of anxious teens on high alert?

Validation is a quick follow-up tool to help with this. I've even heard it called "relationship glue."

When you validate your teen, you let them know that their feelings, thoughts and actions make sense to you and are understandable.

Validating statements might sound like:

"I hear you're worried about the test and that makes sense because I know how important your grades are to you."

"I understand that you're feeling overwhelmed. How can I best support you right now?"

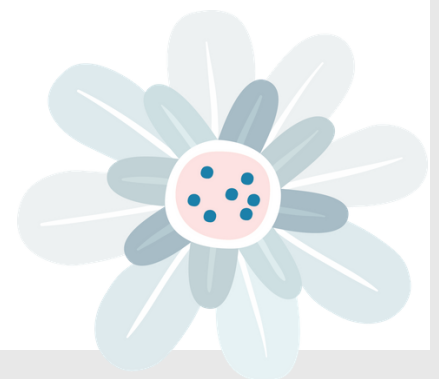
"It makes sense that you're tired after staying up so late to get your homework done last night."



3. Validation (cont.)

A couple of important things to remember about Validation:

1. Validation is not problem solving. It is just recognizing how your teen is feeling and acknowledging the validity of those feelings. You might ask your teen if there is something you can do to help and if they offer something, great. But do not jump in and try to rescue them from their emotion.
2. As with any communication, for Validation to be effective, your language and tone of voice have to match your words. Validating words delivered in a dismissive or frustrated tone will not accomplish the offer of support and connection you're seeking.
3. If there isn't time to deeply process what your teen is feeling in the current moment, that's OK. Validation lets them know that you hear and understand where they're coming from, and that may be enough. If your teen wants more conversation, you can set up a specific time to come back together for that.



3. Validation (cont.)

Genuine Validation offers some amazing benefits:

- It helps your teen feel safe in expressing their emotions;
- It provides your teen with a sense of comfort that you will be there to help process their emotions if they ask;
- It eases difficult emotions, actually decreasing their intensity;
- It builds trust between you and your teen that will carry over to other parts of your relationship.



At first, these tools will feel artificial and awkward - to borrow a word from our teens. But, worthwhile change starts with discomfort and yes, awkwardness.

Just sharing a few words about feelings, emotions, and wellness with your teen will open doors to deeper and more meaningful conversation. It will offer you a chance to celebrate joy, confidence or energy that you may have otherwise missed. It will help you attune to worry, tension or overwhelm that you may have sensed but didn't know how to confirm.

Try using these tools consistently for 30 days. That's how long it takes to build a new habit. I am confident that if you do you will see a real shift in your communication with your teen. You will both feel a growth in connection that you've been longing for.

