

Talking with teens

Make your conversations easier with these 28 questions



Starting up conversations with your teen can be simple with these questions. Find time each day to ask a question that will get you both talking.



When was the last time you felt sad?

We all feel sad sometimes. But if someone you love often feels sad, hopeless or grouchy, it could be a sign of depression. Finding less joy in activities, sleeping more or less, and eating differently can be signs too.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Anxiety and depression in children [cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/depression.html](https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/depression.html).



How do you fall asleep each night?

To be healthy and rested, it's important to get enough sleep. Your school-age kids and teens need about 9½ hours each night, and adults need 7–9 hours. Teach your loved ones to keep their phone outside their bedroom and the TV off to help them fall asleep.

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Brain basics: Understanding sleep. [ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Understanding-Sleep#4](https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Understanding-Sleep#4).



What's your favorite meal? And why?

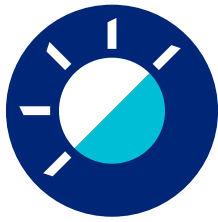
Nutrition is important for people of all ages, including growing teens. If what your teen eats, and when, is starting to take over their thoughts. This could be a potential sign of an eating disorder.



What would you do if you couldn't use social for a week?

Social media can make some people feel anxious. We might worry about what others think. We might worry we're missing out. And the constant notifications can be stressful.

Steele RG, Hall JA, Christofferson JL. Conceptualizing digital stress in adolescents and young adults: Toward the development of an empirically based model. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev*. 2020 Mar; 23(1):15–26. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31392451/



When was the last time you felt really happy?

Feeling happy all the time isn't realistic. We all have bad days. But if the teen or young adult in your life has been feeling sad for a while, it could be a sign of depression. Other signs include feeling irritable, having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, and feeling guilty or worthless.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Mental health conditions: Depression and anxiety. [cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/depression-anxiety.html](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/depression-anxiety.html).



Do you act differently at home?

It's often good to match how we act with the situation. We might be more professional at work and more playful with friends. Yet it's also important to find our true selves. Be confident in knowing that what makes each of us unique is what makes us great.



Describe a time when you felt nervous.

Presenting in front of the class. Trying something new. The reason might vary, but we all get nervous sometimes. If you feel this way often, though, it could be a sign of anxiety.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Anxiety and depression in children. [cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/depression.html](https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/depression.html).



What are you most worried about right now?

Everyone worries sometimes. But constant worries could be a sign of anxiety. If you think it could be affecting your loved one, reach out for help. Healthy eating, exercise, sleep and mindfulness can help as well.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Anxiety and depression in children. [cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/depression.html](https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/depression.html).



What are you grateful for today?

Being grateful can have physical and emotional benefits. That includes reducing stress. Urge your loved ones to think about what they're grateful for every day. After a week, see if it's made them feel any different.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Practicing gratitude works. [cdc.gov/howrightnow/gratitude/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/howrightnow/gratitude/index.html).



What's most valuable to you?

We all value different things. For some, relationships — or things that make us think of them — are essential. For others, what we purchase carries great weight. Ask your loved one to take a moment to reflect on what they really care about.



What's one habit you wish you could break?

Some habits, like practicing gratitude or getting regular exercise, are great. Others, such as smoking and vaping, aren't good for our health. If your teen or young adult has a habit they'd like to break, tell them to watch for what triggers them to do the activity and try to remove that cue. Look for ways to replace bad habits with good ones too.

American Heart Association. How to break bad habits and change behaviors. [heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/mental-health-and-wellbeing/howto-break-bad-habits-and-change-behaviors](https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/mental-health-and-wellbeing/howto-break-bad-habits-and-change-behaviors).



Do you ever feel pressure to do something risky?

Peer pressure can be a good thing. Like if friends are encouraging each other to get good grades. But sometimes teens talk each other into risky behaviors. That can include driving fast, drinking or skipping class.

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. Peer pressure. [aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Peer-Pressure-104.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Peer-Pressure-104.aspx).



You're stranded on an island. Who do you text first? Why?

Whether it's a real emergency or everyday life, having a good support system is important. Make sure your loved ones know who they can trust, whether it be friends, family or professionals.



What was the last book, song or movie that made you feel something?

We all experience emotions: We can feel happy, sad, frustrated, angry and far more. Learning to understand and manage our emotions can have a big impact on our lives. It may lead to better grades and test scores in school.

American Psychological Association. Students do better in school when they can understand, manage emotions. [apa.org/news/press/releases/2019/12/students-manage-emotions](https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2019/12/students-manage-emotions).



What would you do with \$100?

Knowing how to make smart decisions about money often starts with learning about it in the teenage years. Teach your teen about the importance of earning, budgeting and saving. Make sure they know how loans and credit cards work too.



What is one thing you hope to accomplish in a few years?

Most teens have heard the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" It can be intimidating and stressful if, like most teens, they aren't sure. It's great to set goals and figure out how to achieve them. But make sure you aren't putting too much pressure on the young people in your life.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Teenagers and young adults. [consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/money-as-you-grow/teen-young-adult/](https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/money-as-you-grow/teen-young-adult/).



Which emoji describes your mood today?

Think about the last time someone asked, “How are you doing?” There’s a good chance you said, “I’m fine.” But the truth is, we aren’t fine all the time. Sometimes we’re joyful, angry, sad, nervous, frustrated and so much more. Make sure your teen or young adult understands that it’s OK to admit how they’re really feeling — and reach out for help when they need it.



What can I do to support you better?

Being a parent is tough. So is being a teen. Be open with each other, and share what you honestly need to feel supported. It might be awkward at first, but it can model a strong relationship. That’s something that will be important for years to come.



Why do you think you are a good friend?

Trust, honesty, mutual respect, good communication. What makes a good friend? A good person to date? Make sure your loved ones understand how to pick relationships based on respect.



What’s the most embarrassing thing I do?

Building a positive relationship with your teen is important. Be open to their opinions. Truly listen. And show that you care how they feel.



What do you wish you were more motivated to do?

Getting motivated isn't always easy. Ask your loved ones what helps them reach their goals.



What's your favorite thing about yourself? Least favorite?

Self-esteem is about valuing and respecting yourself. Encourage your loved ones to think about all their good traits. It can help them have healthy self-esteem. And that can help them feel confident in school, work and other areas of their life.

American Psychological Association. Students experiencing low self-esteem or low perceptions of competence. [apa.org/ed/schools/primer/self-esteem](https://www.apa.org/ed/schools/primer/self-esteem).



What is something you are proud of?

Being proud of what we do and who we are is important. Encourage the young people in your life to celebrate themselves and what they've done. It's not just about big things. Everyday actions, like being a good friend and helping others, deserve pride too.



What's the hardest thing you have ever done?

Whether it's reaching an athletic goal, getting the courage to sing in front of an audience or dealing with the loss of a loved one, we all are faced with big challenges. Some we choose and others we have to deal with. Encourage your loved ones to celebrate all that they've overcome. Celebrate all that they're capable of doing in the future too.



What are you most afraid of?

Snakes. Flying. Public speaking. Heights. Many of us are afraid of something. Fears aren't generally harmful, but if you see that your teen or young adult is really going out of their way to avoid something, it could be a phobia — a very strong, ongoing fear. Most phobias can be treated, so encourage your loved one to reach out for help.

American Psychiatric Association. What are anxiety disorders? psychiatry.org/patients-families/anxiety-disorders/what-are-anxiety-disorders. HelpGuide. Phobias and irrational fears. helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/phobias-and-irrational-fears.htm.



What was the last kind act you did or saw?

Being kind to others isn't just good for them. It can also make us happier and healthier. So encourage your loved one to look for ways to be kind every day. Acts that include social contact — like holding the door or sharing a meal with someone — can have even more benefits.

Abrams Z. The case for kindness. American Psychological Association. apa.org/news/apa/kindness-mental-health.



If you could have any superpower, what would it be? And how would you use that in your day-to-day?

We can't fly, become invisible or do some of the other amazing things that superheroes can do. But we all have things that make us amazing in our own ways. Take a moment to teach your loved ones to value their strengths. And to value those they see in others.



What would a perfect day be like, from the moment you wake up until you fall asleep?

A perfect day might be hard to achieve. But taking time for what we enjoy each day is important. So is time for what's important to our health. Tell your family to start by making sure they get enough sleep. Then make sure they take some "me time" for reading, hanging out with a friend, playing music or doing something else they enjoy.