For many parents talking to their teenager is difficult. The level of difficulty often increases when your teenager has a mental health or behavior challenge.

The following suggestions are written by teens who are in a support group for mental health.

**Tips for Engaging Your Child:**

**Ask me if it’s a good time to talk.** I am unique. I may want to talk with you immediately when something is on my mind, or I may only share when there aren’t any other distractions and it’s just you and me.

**Listen** to what I say without speaking or interrupting.

**Show you are interested** by looking me in the eye with real empathy. If I avoid eye contact, know it is just hard for me sometimes.

Sometimes I would rather write you a letter than talk. **Allow me to choose my way to communicate.**

**Be patient with me.** Sometimes I just can’t follow or find the words; be ready to repeat your questions or statements if I ask you to do so.

**Be calm.** I may be feeling emotions I can’t control; being calm will help me and yelling will not.

**Allow me to approach you** when I feel you are ready to listen to me.

I may not always be comfortable talking with you. If appropriate, **allow me to talk to another trusted adult** to get help.

When I am struggling in school, **ask me about it in an understanding and calm way.** I am most likely already feeling bad about it.

Make sure you **praise me** when appropriate. Otherwise I may think the only time you want to talk is when I have done something you don’t like.

**Give me time.** Let me know I am important to you and I will talk to you when I am ready.

Recognize that **I have my own skills, talents and ideas.**

**Speak with me in a gentle manner.** When you yell or swear it hurts me, and I may act out or not talk to you.