



# FIVE KEYS TO UNLOCKING CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR TEENAGE SON

# SEX. DRUGS. PORN. YOUTH SUICIDE

**Yep, these are the elephants in the room, right? And as a parent or carer, chatting about them with your teenage son can feel like entering the unknown.**

We get it! And don't worry you are not alone. By grabbing this guide, you're not just diving into the world of teenage communication, you're joining a community of Top Blokes mentors and supporters.

We're ready to share with you some of our key takeaways from working with thousands of boys and young men.

We live in a world where misinformation is rife, and the pressures of social conformity are intense. Teenage boys are often left to navigate complex issues without a compass. Mainstream and social media, along with peer influence, can skew perceptions and expectations, leading to a shaky foundation for personal and interpersonal respect.

As parents and carers, we can empower our young men to think critically, make informed choices, and own their future. This guide is your first step towards laying a solid foundation for your son to connect, communicate and feel supported.

Together we can help him lead a healthy, happy and safe life.

**WALK ALONGSIDE YOUR CHILD.  
BE HIS CHAMPION.**

“ He seems a lot more confident in explaining how he feels about things and also talking about the more difficult topics. ”

**TOP BLOKES PARENT**

## TIP 1

# DEMONSTRATE, DON'T JUST ARTICULATE

As a society we're doing a better job of giving boys a voice and a safe environment to open up. Yet many young males still feel hesitant to do so.

Even with the advances we have made in challenging society's construct, our young men still feel the pressures of adhering to what is perceived as the 'man up' social norm. It's up to us to continually challenge these beliefs and give our boys the chance to open up in a way that meets their needs.

Teenagers may find it difficult to engage in typical sit-down-style conversations, seeing it as intimidating or even threatening. They'll immediately think they've done something wrong or be on edge. Engaging in an activity your son enjoys can really help him to feel calm and safe to hear you and share what's happening in his world.

Choose a relaxing location free from lots of distractions. This might mean going fishing, tossing the footy in the backyard or just going for a stroll around the neighbourhood. Connect with him on his level and through the things he likes to do. It may take time to build trust for an open dialogue but showing him you are there to listen and to connect together will help provide a strong foundation.

When we do this often enough, we begin to normalise openness and honesty about our feelings without judgment. We demonstrate that it is brave to show our emotions and we build connection and a safe space for conversation.

## CONVSERATION STARTERS

- 1 While engaging in an activity: "I've been thinking about how everyone has tough days. What do you do when you're feeling overwhelmed/angry/worried?"
- 2 After sharing your own experience: "Have you ever felt something like that? It's totally normal if you have."
- 3 In a relaxed setting: "I'm always here if you want to chat, about anything, big or small."

## TIP 2

# DON'T REPEAT REFRAME

Have you tried giving advice to your son only to be met with a roll of the eyes, a cringe or a grunt?

So have our mentors. What they've become experts at is adapting their message and delivery to suit the boys they mentor. They recognise that young men often deny or resist help because they like to feel independent and in control. Perhaps most of us can relate here!

Have you tried reframing the way you reach out to your son? Try this, don't verbalise how you're helping him, reframe it as a suggestion rather than advice.

For example, instead of "Do you need help?" where he'll have to admit that he needs help, we can say, "Can I have a go at helping you with that?".

This reframes the action from you helping him to him doing you a favour. This maintains his sense of independence while you can still offer your support and guidance.



## HELPFUL WORDS

- 1 Instead of direct advice: "I've found this approach helpful in the past. What's your take on it?"
- 2 Offering help as collaboration: "I'm a bit stuck here; maybe you can help me figure this out?"
- 3 When he's facing a challenge: "This looks tough. How do you plan to tackle it?"

### TIP 3

## HYPOTHETICALS AS ICE-BREAKERS

If your son seems hesitant to discuss certain topics, introducing hypothetical scenarios or discussing third-party situations can open the door without direct pressure. This approach encourages him to share his thoughts and perspectives in a less confrontational setting, fostering open dialogue and critical thinking.

If there's a topic that your son hasn't approached you about, it could be that he's not ready yet. Or maybe he hasn't even considered the fact that he could talk something over with you.

Teenagers have access to the internet and their friends, and for some young men, this is easier than talking to their parents. It might be a good idea to test the waters here. This isn't about forcing him to have a talk that he doesn't want to have - this is about helping him understand that when he is ready, you're there.

A useful way to go about starting this conversation is to use hypotheticals or third-party examples. This is also helpful because often young men don't want to directly admit things to their parents.

This isn't an opportunity to lecture. It's a chance to hear your son's perspective. His response might only be a few words, but this is where you can engage. Ask him why he thinks that way. Acknowledge what he says with a "That's great" or "That's an interesting point. What about this...?".

### HELPFUL WORDS

- 1 "I heard about these boys who...is this pretty common?"
- 2 "Did you hear about this in the news?"
- 3 "I heard today that...if you were there, what would you have done?"

What he says may not be what you believe, or it might not be a fully-informed opinion, but this is about gaining insight into his views and thinking while also encouraging him to think about his decision-making and why he believes what he does.

In his eyes, what he's saying is not wrong. Your role right now is not to convince him he's wrong, but to help broaden his perspective so he can come to his own conclusion and develop better-informed beliefs.

Boys are more likely to respond when they feel a discussion is being opened up with them - not when they feel are being lectured about right from wrong. Inviting them into a two-way conversation creates a space for connection while also allowing for perspectives to be respectfully challenged.

## TIP 4

# DON'T TACKLE IT HEAD ON

For many teens, direct conversations about emotions can be challenging. Sometimes, it's easier for your son to indirectly talk about how he's feeling when you use indirect methods like scales, comparisons or analogies.

Much like when you encourage him to talk while kicking a ball, or while you are driving, the indirect method helps introduce him to a behaviour that you'd like to normalise, one that he's, so far, been socially conditioned to avoid.

Our mentors have found attributing feelings or ideas to something less emotional, like numbers or objects can sometimes get the conversation started.

When you do this, it's up to you to set the example. Start with yourself; let him know where you're at and why you feel that way. Make it a normal part of the daily routine to share feelings and ideas. Once you set the standard and commit to it, it's likely your son will soon follow suit.

## HELPFUL WORDS

- 1 "Expressing feelings non-verbally: "On a scale from 1 to 10, how was your day today?"
- 2 Using analogies: "If today was a weather forecast, what would it be? Sunny, stormy, a bit cloudy?"
- 3 Reflecting on experiences: "Which movie character do you feel like today? Why?"





## TIP 5

# THERE'S A TIME AND A SPACE

Recognising that your son is ready or not ready to talk is really important. We want him to know that we respect his space while ensuring he knows you're available when he is. Consistently cultivating a calm, non-judgmental environment at home encourages open communication and shows that you're a reliable support system, ready whenever he is.

Sometimes though you just have to leave it! But it's important to let him know that, when he is ready, you're ready too. Again, this is more than just words - it's about actions. An open, accepting and respectful space at home will help set the foundations for a lasting and positive relationship with your son for years to come.

This is a long-term commitment so it's important to check our actions. How do you respond to the small things that happen throughout the day? What's your reaction if he burns the toast? If he breaks a glass? If he leaves his footy ball down at training or even worse his boots? What comments do you make about the news story you just saw? What impressions of you does your son receive from your reactions and responses?

Through the small every day things, your son begins to build a view of how you may react to the bigger, more important things. If it's a negative view, he won't approach you. When we invest time in establishing a calm, open and honest home to connect, be accepted and be safe, your family will reap rewards in the long-term.

## HELPFUL WORDS

- 1 Showing readiness to listen: "Whenever you're ready to talk, I'm here. No pressure."
- 2 After a failed attempt to communicate: "I can see now's not the best time. Let's find a better moment."
- 3 Establishing an open-door policy: "Remember, any time you want to chat, I'm all ears, even if it's out of the blue."

# LET'S WRAP UP

The transition from boyhood to young adulthood is a pivotal period, filled with opportunities for growth, learning, and deeper connection.

The essence of these conversations goes beyond the topics themselves. Each conversation and shared experience lays the groundwork for a strong, open relationship and contributes to his development.

It's about fostering trust, showing unconditional support, and reinforcing that you're a safe person in the rocky seas of adolescence. Each dialogue, each shared moment, and every question posed contributes to the foundation of his character and the depth of your relationship.

Your role as a parent or caregiver is invaluable, and your influence, love and care is profound. By applying the principles and strategies outlined in this guide, you're not just addressing the "elephants in the room"; you're also helping to shape a generation of young men who are respectful, empathetic, and self-aware.





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# **MENTORING YOUNG MALES TO LIVE HEALTHY AND SAFE LIVES**

**TOPBLOKES.ORG.AU**



1300 450 850



info@topblokes.org.au



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