

## Listening Age 18 Summary

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### Why Listening?

Your teen's success depends on their ability to listen and understand what you and others communicate. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-teen relationship while building essential listening skills in your teen.

**Tip:** These steps are done best when you and your teen is not tired or in a rush.

**Tip:** Intentional communication and healthy parenting relationships will support these steps.

### **STEP 1** **GET INPUT** **Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input**

- *“Do you feel listened to? When and by whom?”*
- *“How do you know that the person truly listens to you?”*
- *“Are there times when someone is not listening to you?”*
- *“How does that make you feel?”*

**Tip:** During a family meal, explore the question: *“What does it take to listen well?”* Allow each family member to respond—model listening by allowing each person to complete their thoughts without interruption or judgment.

### **STEP 2** **TEACH** **Teach New Skills**

- Model specific listening strategies while interacting with your teen.
  - Ask yourself: “What is my body communicating, and how am I demonstrating I’m listening?”
  - Listen for thought and feeling.
  - Teens still seek and need attention from their parents and those in a parenting role to thrive. Build a special time into your routine when you are fully present to listen to what your teen has to tell you.

- Learn listening strategies together. Teens are keenly interested in figuring out social dilemmas (asking a crush on a date, talking to a teacher about a poor grade, or responding to mean words). Share a challenge (without a clear solution) at dinnertime, and try out one of the following.
  - Get curious. Don't stop asking questions when you get one-word answers. Try: *"Say more, what was fine about it?"* or *"What was difficult about today?"* or *"What went well?"* or *"Let's start at the beginning,"* or *"What made you laugh today?"*
  - Find opportunities to share. Model what it is like to share about your day. If your teen asks you how your day was, do not respond with a superficial or one-word answer. Engage them about a conflict you had or a struggle you faced. See if they can help offer suggestions.
  - Use active listening. One person listens to fully understand what the speaker is saying and waits until the speaker is finished talking before responding.
  - Paraphrase. Echo back to the speaker a summary of what they've said to check how accurate your listening is and confirm to the speaker that you have heard them. You might start, *"I heard you say that..."*
  - Seek clarification. Practice seeking clarification by asking questions like, *"What did you mean when you said you weren't happy this morning? What happened?"*
  - Practice questioning and commenting with empathy. Instead of responding to a speaker with your own experiences, focus solely on the content of what has been communicated. For example, your teen might say, "Today, Mrs. Smith started a new writing project. We get to write an essay on any topic we are interested in. I can't wait." You might say, *"Sounds like you are excited about this project. Have you thought about what topic you are going to choose?"*

**Tip:** As your teen spends more time alone and with their peers, it can be challenging to entice them into meaningful conversations. "Fine" might be all you get in response to *"How was your day?"* So, turn down the car radio. Hang around them without your phone. Offer plenty of chances to listen when they are ready to talk.

**STEP**  
**3**



**PRACTICE**

### Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Model aloud for yourself: *"I'm setting a goal to listen at dinner without interrupting."* This helps reintroduce one of the conversation or listening strategies you've taught your family to practice at dinner.
- Recognize effort by noticing. *"I noticed how you listened fully to your sister when she was upset. That's so helpful to her."*
- Play a favorite family board game. At the start, set a goal to listen to each other carefully.
- Work on lateral thinking riddles or logic puzzles together that require attentive listening and critical thinking skills.
- Listen to TED Talks together and discuss with your teen what was exciting or challenging about the talk.

**STEP**  
**4**



**SUPPORT**

### Support Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions such as: “*How did your lesson in literature class go today? Do you understand what you must do for your long-term research paper?*”
- Learn about development. Each new age will present different social challenges.
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for trying out new and different listening strategies can offer additional support and motivation for your teen when challenging issues arise.
- Engage in further practice. To reinforce skills, return to setting a listening goal for dinnertime conversations. Create more opportunities to practice when all is calm.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

**Trap:** When your teen does not listen to you or is clearly focusing elsewhere, you might be tempted to scold or constantly remind but give them additional chances. Everyone loses their focus sometimes. Seek clarification on what they heard and did not, and then review what you said again to help them refocus their attention.

STEP  
**5**



**RECOGNIZE**

## Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. “*I noticed you listened with focus to your sister’s story. I know that makes her feel cared about. That’s so important.*”
- Recognize small steps along the way. Find small ways your teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, if your teen makes up for ignoring you by apologizing, sincerely recognize that effort. Include hugs and quality time together to appreciate one another.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2024). *Listening Age 18 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

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