

Communication Skills

1. Prepare.

- Talk with other parent/guardian about the desired outcomes.
 - Agree on any new boundaries that need to be set.
 - Agree on the consequences if your child doesn't adhere to your clearly stated expectations.
 - Agree to and promise to both follow through.

2. Cues that show you are not ready to begin the conversation.

- Overly emotional (angry, tearful, yelling).
- Not "on the same page" as other parent or guardian.
- Expectations of a resolution.
- Not in the heat of the moment (e.g. if they come home intoxicated) or when emotionally charged.

3. Regulate your anxiety.

- Deep breathing (from the diaphragm).
- Know when and where to start the conversation.
 - When: At a time of day when there will be no distractions or interruptions, and when the parents or guardians are aligned and calm.
 - Where: In a setting that will meet your child's needs (e.g. if your child is uncomfortable with sitting down and talking face to face, recommend going for a drive or talking during a shared activity, etc.).
- Be ready to listen.
 - Be mindful of body language, tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions.
 - Don't interrupt your son or daughter.
 - Keep emotions neutral; self-regulate strong reactions/emotions.
- Create a conversation based on mutual respect.
 - Open with a question that doesn't have a yes or no answer, "Help me to understand..." and then listen.
 - Show understanding.
 - Repeat back or summarize what your child said.
 - Practice patience.
 - Emphasize positive behaviors and choices.

4. Appropriate follow through.

- Close on a positive note, with a plan to talk again after you have time to process what you have discussed.
- Be prepared to follow through with the stated consequences if your son or daughter has not maintained the boundaries you have set.
- If the conversation did not prove helpful, or if it is clear that there is reason to be concerned, seek professional help for yourselves, and for your son or daughter.
- We cannot be expected to address problems that are too emotional or frightening for us, or that involve mental health needs that merit attention.
Do not hesitate to ask for help! Reach out to...
 - school resources throughout your school district (guidance, principals, teachers)
 - pediatrician
 - other healthcare professionals who can assess your child's needs

5. Consistency.

- Do we have a consistent message?
- Are the "house rules" agreed upon by everyone, and reliably enforced?

