

# How Do I Get Through to My Teenager?



Elaine Taylor-Klaus, CPCC, PCC, and Diane Dempster, MHSA, CPC, PCC, are certified professional coaches, community educators, and advocates for families living with ADHD. With six complex kids between their two families, they are passionate about helping parents reduce the stress of raising children with ADHD. They are the cofounders of [ImpactADHD.com](http://ImpactADHD.com), a global resource offering training, coaching, and guidance for parents. Taylor-Klaus is a member of the board of directors of CHADD.

**CHADD:** How can I communicate effectively with my teenager?

**DEMPSTER & TAYLOR-KLAUS:** We teach a three-step communication process to help parents and teenagers keep the relationship in the forefront. First, you want to acknowledge the teen's experience. Teenagers want to be seen and heard. Start by acknowledging the situation and normalizing their experience. Try saying, "It's perfectly normal for you to be going through this," "It makes sense that you're going through this," or "I know it's hard."

Next you want to connect with compassion. Show you can relate to their experience and the challenge they are facing. Compassion helps enhance your acknowledgment of the situation and makes you a human piece in the puzzle rather than just someone telling them what to do.

The last step is to explore solutions together. We want teenagers to start making their own decisions and doing their own problem solving. Thinking of multiple solutions together allows you to help them problem solve in a practical way. By collaborating to find solutions rather



than starting with them, you're no longer putting your teen on the defensive. You're giving her the opportunity to learn how to figure it out on her own.

### I want to support my teenager. How do I know when to offer help and when my support may be too much?

The most important piece of supporting teens is to not see them where you want them to be, but where they are. You want to meet them where they are and raise the bar from there. Let them try some different things, such as chores or homework, without offering support. If they can do it independently 80 percent of the time with whatever systems they use, then they can do it on their own.

On the other hand, if they are struggling with something, fall back on the three-step communication strategy. Sometimes our teens can't do what they know they should be able to do. It's maddening and frustrating for them. Offer support in the form of a conversation that begins with acknowledgement and compassion. Then invite them to grow in little steps.

### How do I know if situations are my child's ADHD or typical teenager behavior?

The bottom line is that it's about loving and supporting your teenager through the teenage years. If whatever's happening in your teen's brain is due to ADHD, hormones, or yesterday's breakup with a girlfriend or boyfriend, then it really doesn't matter if it's the ADHD or not. It's more important to stay connected so you can support and empower your teen as he or she problem solves through situations.

### What can I do to motivate my teen to do things, such as chores, exercise, take medication, do homework, etc.?

Motivation is a key part of telling the ADHD brain to engage in action. One of the common mistakes we make as par-

ents, however, is that we try to motivate our kids to do what we want them to do. Instead we need to focus on the five things that really motivate the ADHD brain: novelty, urgency, interest, competition, and enjoyment.

Focusing on these five things helps you gain buy-in from your teenager. Rather than approaching a scenario from why you want it to happen, you really want to look at how interested your teenager is in doing what you want him or her to do. Teens need to know what's in it for them. The best motivation is going to be their wanting to do things for their own reasons. Find the interest and engagement for them through open conversations.

If you want to get your teen to go to bed earlier, for example, have a conversa-

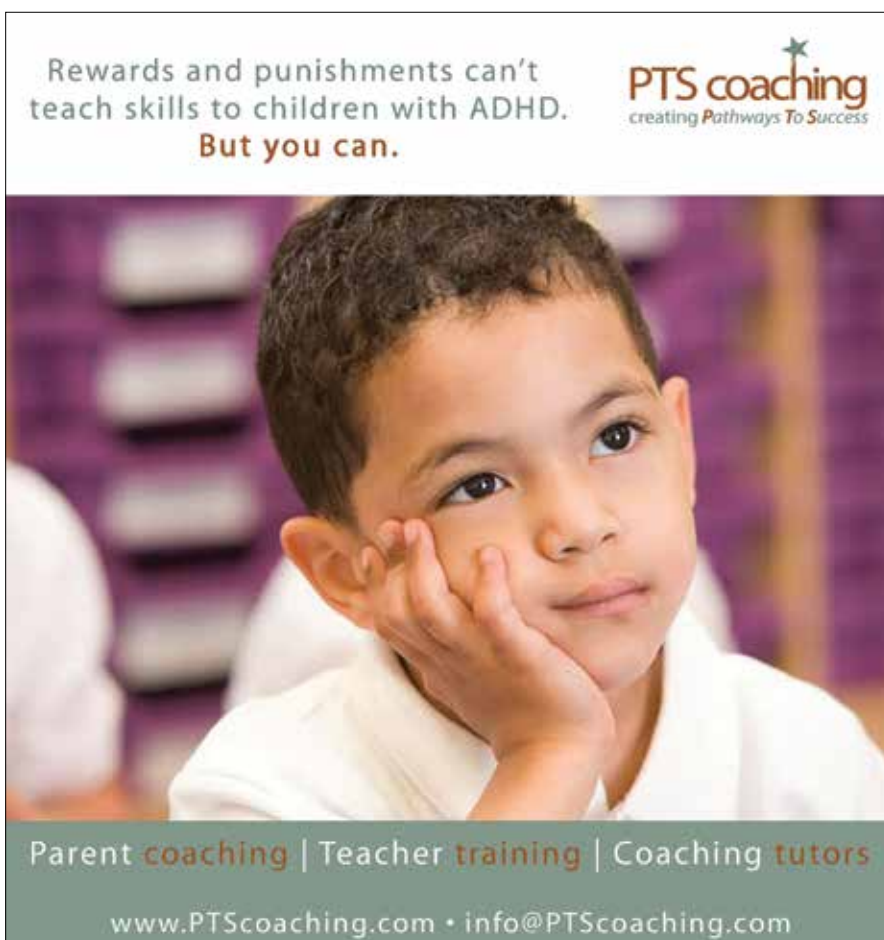
tion about the situation. While he may not be interested in going to bed earlier, you might find that he is interested in a related situation, such as getting to school on time in the morning. Once you find out what your teen is interested in, then problem solve that particular scenario. One solution that he comes up with could be to go to bed earlier. 🗨

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**Robyn Maggio, MSW**, is the Education and Training Coordinator at the National Resource Center on ADHD: A Program of CHADD.

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