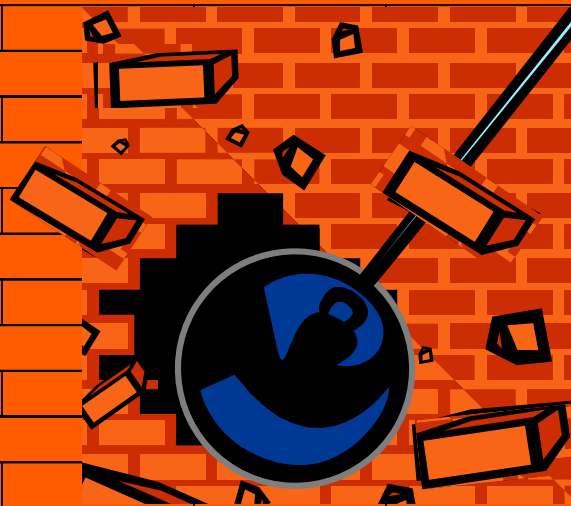


How to Talk to a Brick Wall: **Tearing Down the Barriers between You and Your Teenager**

By Jessica and Enrique



Does This Sound Like Your Family?

● Parents

- Yelling and threatening
- Giving ultimatums
- Throwing insults
- Making future plans without considering their child's feelings

● Teenagers

- Yelling and Crying
- Lying
- Sneaking out
- Running away
- Abusing drugs
- Defying authority
- Making future plans without considering their parents' feelings

This is a description of Juliet's family from the play *Romeo and Juliet*... Times haven't changed much!



“...tell my lord and father, madam,
I will not marry yet...”
*Lies! She was already married to Romeo
behind her parents' back!*

That story
didn't turn
out well.
There must
be a better
way...

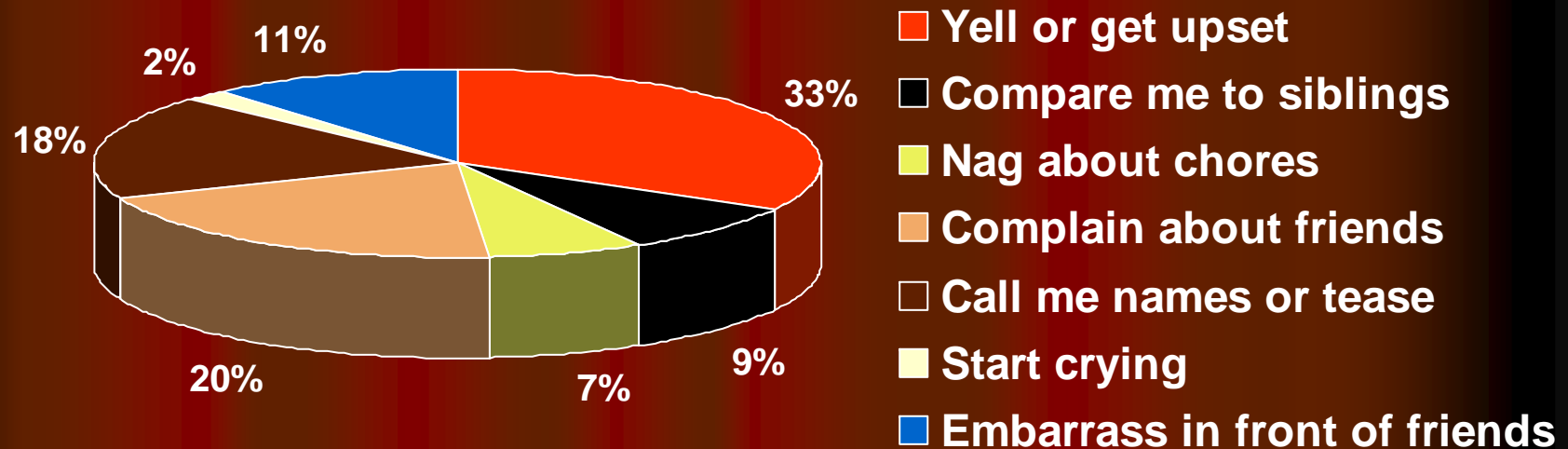
“Hang thee, young baggage! Disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what,--get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face:
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me;
My fingers itch [to hit you]...”

Lord Capulet to Juliet
Romeo and Juliet, Act III, scene V

What *Not* To Do If You *Really* Want to Talk to Your Teenagers...

Survey Results from 126 teenagers (58% girls, 42% boys)

Question: What is the number one thing your parents say or do to shut down communication between you?



What *Not* To Do If You *Really* Want to Talk to Your Teenagers...

- Say things that make them “feel bad, disappointed, threatened, stupid or wrong.”
 - It breeds low self-esteem, destroys confidence, encourages performance anxiety, causes distrust, results in avoidance of family events.”¹
- Try to correct, criticize, or change them.
- Argue with them.
- Say, “I know what you mean” or oversympathize before you have understanding.

What *Not* To Do If You *Really* Want to Talk to Your Teenagers...

- “Push your ideas down your teenagers’ throat.”²
 - If you try to impose your ideas on them, they will most likely reject what you have to offer.
 - Trying to mold your teenagers into your own image won’t work. This is the time for them to find out who they are—and it’s not you.
- Nag or complain about a behavior, action, or inaction.
- Do all the talking, diagnose the problem, and give lots of advice.
- Overreact if you hear something you don’t like or that worries you.
- “Interrupt, correct grammar or do two things at once. These are all signals that you aren’t really interested.”³

What To Do If You *Really* Want to Talk to Your Teenagers ...

- Ask open-ended questions that help clarify what the person means.
 - Examples: Do you mean...? Why do you think that happened?
- Ask their opinion—and want to hear it.
 - Accept their opinions and what they have to say—it doesn't mean you agree, but that you *do* value their thoughts.
 - "Avoid conflict over answers. There are no right or wrong answers" when it comes to opinions.¹
- Listen in order to understand—not to change the other person.
- Show concern for the other person's feelings.

What To Do If You *Really* Want to Talk to Your Teenagers ...

- Make time for just talking and, most importantly, for listening every day.
 - "Use all the informal opportunities you can to communicate - for example, driving."²
 - Don't force the time to talk—make sure that it's a convenient time for your teenager, too.
 - Make it a priority to be available even if it's not a convenient time for *you*.
- Don't try to solve problems when you're just talking to better understand each other's viewpoints. That can come later.
- Keep your sense of humor, but never tease about a sensitive subject. Learn to laugh about the small stuff.

Listening Tips

- **Be attentive.**
 - Stop other activities.
 - Focus fully, using your eyes as well as your ears.
 - Be sensitive to their tone of voice and expression.
- **Encourage talk.**
 - Smile, if appropriate, or nod to show you understand.
 - Watch your body language.
 - Keep your questions brief, open, and positive.
- **Empathize.**
 - Try to remember what it was like when you were a teen.
 - Focus on underlying feelings that your teen may find difficult to express.
- **Listen with respect.**
 - React to your teenager as you would to an adult friend.
 - Let them vent their grievances.
 - Try not to interrupt or push a topic they don't want to discuss.⁴

Talking Tips

- **Be brief.**
 - Let them do most of the talking.
- **Watch your tone of voice.**
 - Sometimes it isn't what you say -- it's how you say it.
- **Express your feelings.**
 - Reveal some of your inner self.
 - Emphasize your feelings, not your teen's behavior.
 - Don't overdo it. Expressing your feelings helps to show you're a real person, but teens are mostly concerned about *their* feelings.
- **Be honest.**
 - Discuss your ideas, concerns, or thoughts openly and calmly.

Dealing with Problems

- **Use “I” statements.** The classic advice of using “I” statements, instead of critical “you” statements, is still a good one.
 - Specifically describe the **situation** that is causing your problem. Just describe; don't blame. Say, “When you don't call or come home at the time we agreed on”
 - State the **effect** the situation has on you. “. . . I don't know where you are. . . .”
 - Identify the **feeling** that you have. “. . . and I begin to worry that something might have happened to you.”⁴
- **Stay calm.** Yelling doesn't help you make your point.

Dealing with Problems

- **Pick and choose your battles.** Things that deal with your teenagers' safety are more important than a messy room or what they wear.
- **Love unconditionally.** Don't give or withhold love based on your teenagers' behavior.
- **Apologize.** If you have done something to aggravate the situation, be the adult and apologize. Set a good example for your teenagers.
- **Involve your teenagers in decisions that affect them.** The family may not be a democracy, but getting everyone's input and trying to compromise when possible is important.

Bring on the Show!

- So let's see what Mr. Capulet would do if he had heard all this good advice before he talked with Juliet...

[scene acted out]





When the Drama Begins at Your Home

Three Things for You to Try This Week:

- When you ask “how was your day?” and your teenager actually answers, stop what you’re doing and really listen.
- Consciously decide to not criticize or pick about the small stuff—try it for a full week and see what happens.
- When an argument is brewing, stop and calmly talk--without blame--about the **situation** involving the problem, the **effect** the situation has on you, and the **feeling** that you have--using “I” statements.



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The photograph is from Matheson Lang's production of *Romeo and Juliet* which opened at the Lyceum Theatre, London, on March 14, 1908, and ran through May 30, 1908.

It is a postcard published by Rotary Photo, London. Card No. 7423E. Photograph by the Daily Mirror Studios.

Nora Kerin as Juliet; Herbert Grimwood as Capulet

<http://shakespeare.emory.edu/postcarddisplay.cfm?cardid=54>



Photograph of a bedroom in the Dolmabahce Palace, Istanbul, Turkey

Photographer: Judi Yost. Used with permission.

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