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### **When teens roll their eyes**

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Article Text:

I bet many of you who are parents of teens can remember the moment when your sweet, loving child all of a sudden started rolling her eyes when you talk. Her eyes seemed to say: Oh Mom, Dad, you are so uncool, so dorky, so outdated, so not hip!

Perhaps we feel hurt or devalued when they do this. We might respond with a request for more respect, or by calling their attention to how this behavior feels to us and asking for it to stop. I think that's important.

We might not notice that we have begun commenting on their behavior in front of others. I'll never forget a comment I heard once in a seminar: "Always remember that adolescents spend every waking hour trying not to be embarrassed."

So this public response to their behavior doesn't work. Most of us know this.

But we're human. Both parents and kids find it hard to contain their feelings sometimes.

I often do family therapy with moms and daughters.

A mom, whom I'll call Kate, shares with me how she and her daughter resolve some of these difficulties in their relationship.

Kate says: "When I stop noticing what is changing about my daughter, how fast she is growing up, things start to feel uncomfortable.

"It's like we're two pieces of sandpaper rubbing together. I begin to realize that we need to talk.

"It's almost like there's a need to play catch up with how she's developed when I wasn't looking.

"Instead of the usual busy way we run past each other, it's time to stop and sit down and give this person, who is so important to me, my complete attention."

Kate tells me that these productive talks often begin with yelling or tears. "I fall apart too," she says.

"After we both calm down, we can start to figure out what's going on."

"I can tell she really appreciates it when I ask her what I've been doing or saying lately that she doesn't like.

"My daughter says she needs me not to lecture her in public — which means around absolutely anybody else. She feels shamed and put down when I do that.

"I think I can agree to hold onto my feelings until we're alone.

"Then I tell my daughter what I want. I really want her to understand how hard her dad and I work and how we need help.

"I want her to understand how much I do for her and that I really don't ask for all that much in return.

The bit of help with chores or whatever I ask for, I'd like done more willingly, without resentment.

"If she has a reason she needs to do it later, I'd love it if she explains it to me without the whine or the roll of the eyes.

"It's amazing that at this moment, this seems like a great bargain because what she is getting in return is really important to her.

"She is getting my promise to understand her need for privacy and not to express my frustration with her behavior unless we're alone and can connect in a more meaningful way."

My experience as a therapist and a mom has taught me that developing and nurturing mutual respect takes a lot of patience.

Teens need to feel that we take their needs seriously in order for them to take ours seriously. It's amazing how effortlessly their respect for us can grow out of our respect for them.

Through the interviews I have done with teens for articles I've written, I have found that having an adult show a genuine interest in what they think and feel can be shocking to teens.

They're not used to getting this routinely from the adult world. They are thrilled when we acknowledge the wisdom in what they say. Many teens have told me that the teachers they really love are the ones

who respect and value them as people — who are mentors and friends.

Family life can be stormy. Yet every day I see in my office how those storms so often produce wonderful and lasting changes in how families relate to each other.

Kids, teens and parents all have to work hard to keep relationships healthy. Parents definitely have to take the lead. We've got to show a willingness to listen.

It's not always easy to put words on complicated and conflicted feelings. But it's comforting to know that when we feel like we've really heard each other, we all benefit from the improved feelings in the family.

Let's face it: We all know that no one is there for you the way a family is, with a moment's notice, when we need them.

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