

We are not alone...and that's a good thing!

“Connection is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard and valued—when they can give and receive without judgment.”

— BRENÉ BROWN, PHD, LMSW

Our adolescents are the most “connected” generation in human history. Their friends are often as close as the tip of the finger...or the thumb. Unfortunately, this type of connection can leave one feeling empty or alone.

Humans are born with a need to connect. Newborns are comforted by the loving touch of caregivers. Toddlers reach for a hand when they cross the street. Young children look for a hug of reassurance when they are disappointed or sad. Once they reach adolescence, it may seem like our children don't need, or want to connect with us anymore, but nothing could be farther from the truth! Studies show that a feeling of connection

to family builds resilience. When we have connection to those who care about us, we find strength to face life's challenges. There is comfort and strength in knowing we are not alone in the world.

What can we do to connect with our adolescents even when it seems like they don't want to connect with us? Here are a few tips:

- * **Eat together.** We all have to eat, right? Meal time can and should be more than just eating in the car on the way to the next event. Research highlights the numerous [benefits of family meals](#) on physical, emotional and mental health.
- * **Listen...just listen.** Listening to our children can be like feeding a wild deer from your hand. You must be very still and quiet and be sure to avoid any sudden movements or they will be “over the fence” and running for safety. They don't always want us to solve their problems or give them advice or the answers to their problems. Sometimes, they just need us to listen without comments, judgment or lectures.
- * **Look in their eyes.** We know that we can listen while we cook dinner, wash the car or fold laundry, but our children need to know that we are paying attention. The best way to communicate to them that they have our undivided focus is by looking in their eyes when they speak. This also teaches them to do the same when we speak to them.
- * **Tell them.** Our children know they are important to us, but they need to *hear* the words “I believe in you,” “You matter,” and “I'm proud of you.”
- * **Make time with them a priority.** Life is busy. We spend so much time rushing from one great opportunity to the next, that before we know it, our children are visiting colleges. Slow down and take the time to just be together. Teaching our children to be comfortable in quiet times is a skill that will serve them well as they mature.
- * **Invest in Traditions.** Some family traditions are decades in the making, others are made in the moment. Traditions keep us connected to a part of who we are. Talk about your family traditions and create new ones.

December Prevention Principle
Connection with others provides security that young people need to stand on their own and develop healthy, creative solutions.

Conversations That Count

Connection us an essential sense of belonging. Research shows that adolescents with close ties to family and community are more likely to have a sense of security that protects them from being vulnerable to risky or unhealthy behaviors.

Family history helps to create our story and connects us. Understanding that history helps adolescents as they begin to understand who they are and how they fit into the world.

Use this [PowerTalk activity](#) to create your [Family Story](#).

Tech Tips for Parents: **Unplug**

Often, the very technology that connects us with the world can interfere with our ability to connect with each other. It is crucial to our health that we all take time to “unplug” from our technology. Research shows that screen time in the hour before [sleep can disrupt sleep patterns](#). In the same way, individuals who keep technology in the room where they sleep are [less likely to experience uninterrupted sleep](#). We also know that extended exposure to technology input can lead to anxiety for adolescents.

We need to help our children learn to “[look up](#)” and interact with real live people. Individuals who are able to be comfortable with social interactions are more successful in all areas of their lives.

Start by taking these steps...

- ⇒ Designate time each day for your entire family to “unplug”—that means *everyone* agrees to put away *all* technology for a specific period of time.
- ⇒ Talk, take a walk, make/eat a meal together, go bowling, play a game, do *something* together...without phones.
- ⇒ At night, keep all family phones/technology in a family charging station *away from sleeping areas*.

It may be difficult at first, but as with any new skill, it will become easier with practice. The connections you make as a family will last a lifetime.