

# *Five Strategies*

FOR EFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR TEEN



**SHELTERWOOD**  
ACADEMY





# *Five Effective Strategies*

As a parent of a struggling teen, communication can be a daily battle. From explosive arguments to cold, distant silence, you can feel like the two of you are speaking different languages. In the middle of communication challenges, it may be hard to know where to start. Shelterwood's experts at the forefront of therapeutic boarding share five strategies for more effective communication with your teen.

## ***1. Understand the factors that influence communication.***

Recognizing what factors lie underneath our surface communication is critical to effectively connecting with your teen. We often consider the words we say – but rarely do we consider all the puzzle pieces that come together to impact our communication.

One key communication influencer is our set of stronghold beliefs. These are the destructive beliefs that affect how we live. Have you ever felt like your head and your heart are at odds with each other – that your mind knows what is true, but there is a different voice in your heart?

Stronghold beliefs affect how we feel and what we do. So from a communication perspective, what will come out of our mouths is what we really believe. You can enter a conversation with the best of intentions, and armed with plenty of communication skills, yet still struggle with your teen because those stronghold beliefs drive communication.

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The condition of our hearts also influences communication.

The condition of our hearts also influences communication. How much trauma have you faced? How about your teen? Trauma can be defined broadly: not only the biggest tragedies of life, but the little losses and disappointments over the course of life. We cannot underestimate the impact trauma has on how we communicate with our teens, as well as how our teens communicate with us. Sometimes, depending on what happens, stronghold beliefs can be created as a result of trauma. When you find yourself in the midst of conflict, consider what life encounters and experiences are driving how you and your teen are communicating.



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### ***2. Recognize the difference between loved-based communication and fear-based communication.***

Whenever we communicate, whether verbally or nonverbally, we are sending a message that is either based in love or based in fear. Every behavior we encounter has a message behind it.

Try this exercise: Put one thumb in one ear and one thumb in the other. Link your fingers together across your eyes. Hard to hear and hard to see, right? You will quickly notice what a distortion that is. Our beliefs act as a similar filter for how we communicate. When you or your teen communicate from a place of fear, the messages we share – and the messages we

receive – are filtered and distorted. Are you communicating through a love-based or a fear-based filter? How about your teenager?

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Every behavior we encounter has a message behind it.

As parents, we do not always listen to understand. We listen to think about how we will respond, direct, protect, correct or inform. We are concerned and we are coming from a space of fear. We have great intentions, but when

our 16-year-old teen acts like a five-year-old, it is easy to wander into that place of fear.

The result? We end up controlling, creating an us-vs.-them opposition instead of authentic communication.

### ***3. Realize your teen's physical age and your teen's brain age may not be the same.***

As children grow, they hit certain developmental milestones – physical, social and emotional. Especially during turbulent teenage years, these developmental milestones do not always coincide. Many factors, including trauma and learning differences, can contribute to a difference between physical age and function compared to brain age and function.

Understanding brain age begins with understanding how our left and right hemispheres interact. The left hemisphere is about intellect (IQ), while the right hemisphere is about



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emotional intelligence (EQ). When these hemispheres are out of balance (with one area strong and one area weak), brain age is impacted. For example, while your teen may be physically 15 years old, his or her brain could be functioning at age 9.

Parents sometimes tell us that when they argue with their teen, they feel as if they are arguing with a lawyer: their teen can articulate exactly what they are thinking. Maybe you have felt the same way. Yet, these same teens can struggle to communicate how an experience has made them feel, or how something has impacted their beliefs. This indicates a stronger left hemisphere and a weaker right hemisphere, with the brain functioning at a younger age.

Here at Shelterwood, 95% of our students are extremely strong in their left hemisphere, indicating a strong intellect and verbal ability. Yet they encounter difficulties with the EQ and lag behind in social and emotional development. Understanding where your teen is in his or her emotional development and brain age can transform how the two of you communicate. At Shelterwood, determining brain age is a critical part of our process, and teens learn at our innovative, on-campus Brain Balance center.

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Connecting is always more important than fixing the problem.

### ***4. Strive to validate your teen in communication***

One of the biggest barriers to communication is the trap of who is right and who is wrong. When we think of the word “validate,” we think that to validate is to surrender, to tell your teen that he or she is right — but validation is actually affirmation. You validate your teen when you say, you matter and what is happening to you right now matters.

Validation is not an endorsement of your teen’s actions, behavior or attitude; it is a deeper connection, a connection that lays groundwork for better communication. Connecting is always more important than fixing the problem. In fact, communication specialists report that 92% of issues resolve themselves when the people feel real connection. Validation is also key to empathy.



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When you tell your teen, I am sorry this happened, you really say you matter. Validation is a way to honor yourself and to honor your teen, putting the holistic relationship above the current scenario.

### ***5. Be conscious of unhealthy and healthy communication patterns.***

It can be easy to fall into unhealthy communication patterns without realizing it. Think about how you interact with your teen and how your teen interacts with you. Do these phrases or sentiments sound familiar?

I'll get you: Analytical; driven by a need for power and a hope for control

I'll give in: Passive; driven by an unmet need for approval or the fear of rejection

I'll get out: Fearful; driven by feeling unsafe in the conflict or feeling ill-equipped to handle the situation; avoiding or escaping the situation

I'll meet you halfway: Controlling; disguised as a compromise

Unhealthy communication patterns develop for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, we are craving safety (for you or for your teen). It may be power or control that we are seeking. In other scenarios, unhealthy communication can be displayed in self-defense and self-protection. Dig deeper to find the roots of our unhealthy communication. Ultimately, unhealthy communication results in disconnection. Recognizing these patterns in yourself and in your teen is the first step in shifting towards healthy communication.

Healthy communication is characterized by words that honor God, honor you and honor your teen. Psalm 19 inspires us to communicate in this way: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable and pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." Healthy communication patterns build the groundwork for new possibilities and valuable connection.

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When your teen is struggling, all you want is real restoration. All you want is your child back. We're here to help, and we'll walk with your family every step of the way towards transformation.

Today can mark a fresh start for your family and for your teen — call 866.585.8939 or contact us online to begin the admissions process.

For more than 30 years, Shelterwood has offered struggling teens and their families opportunity for transformation. Need a fresh start with your teen? We're here to help. Inquire today and talk to an Admissions Counselor for free.

CONTACT US: [shelterwood.org](http://shelterwood.org) [info@shelterwood.org](mailto:info@shelterwood.org) 800.584.5005

