

BARRIERS AND BUILDERS EXERCISE

Below are common behaviours which can act as Barriers to communication with our teens. If you notice you sometimes react in one of those ways (and we all do) ... why not try the alternative strategies? Builders help build communication and connection.

Behaviours

Barriers	Builders
Assuming	Checking it out
Rescuing or Explaining	Exploring
Overly Directing	Encouraging or Inviting
Expecting (unrealistic)	Celebrating
Being Adultist	Respecting

1. The Barrier: Assuming

Thinking you know:

what your teenager thinks – what they will do – how they will respond.

The Builder: Checking it out

Asking sincere, curious questions of our teens about what they think, what they plan to do, what they would do if the situation changes.

Trying to understand why they chose to respond the way they did.

2. The Barrier: Rescuing or Explaining

Rescuing: stepping in to solve a problem for our teen. This prevents them from learning from the consequences of their choices.

Explaining: explaining what happened and why things went wrong. This does the thinking for our teens, and makes it harder to connect cause and effect.

The Builder: Exploring

Asking “what, why, and how” questions that help our teens explore what happened, and what they could do differently.

For example, ask: “What could you do differently next time?”

3. The Barrier: Overly Directing

Giving instructions to our teens at each step of the way, or insisting on one way to do things. Why we do this? To make sure it's done the right way = *my way!*

Our attitude is one of **control** at all costs

The Builder: Encouraging or Inviting

Encouraging our teens to take responsibility for their own actions.

Inviting them to try for themselves and to learn through their own mistakes.

Our attitude is one of respect. We see our teens as resources, as a capable young persons with different way of doing things.

4. The Barrier: Expecting

Setting *unrealistic* standards for our teens then pointing out their failure to reach those standards.

The Builder: Celebrating

Recognizing effort as well as progress and encouraging any step in that direction.

5. The Barrier: Being Adultist

Forgetting what it was like to be a teen

Demanding that teens think and act like an adult.

Asking: "When will you ever grow up?" "What is wrong with you?"

The Builder: Respecting

Being willing to "get into the world of our teen"

Respecting their age and stage of development, and supporting opportunities to mature.

Asking: "Let me understand what you think and feel about..." or

"What is your understanding of (what time you need to be home)?"

We don't have to change everything at once. Communication is much more effective (with teens or adults) if we can stop or reduce a Barrier behaviour. If you decide to try a Builder behaviour, there can be even more dramatic results. And your teen will learn effective communication techniques through your modeling that will last a lifetime.