

# Talking with your Teen: Navigating the Highs and Lows



## THE TEENAGE BRAIN

The **prefrontal cortex** - or, the 'rational' part of the brain - does not fully develop until age 25. This region of the brain is responsible for exercising good judgement and considering long-term consequences. To compensate, the teenage brain processes information with the **amygdala** - or, the 'emotional' part of the brain - which develops much earlier.

This staggered brain development accounts for behavioural challenges and frustrations when communicating with and understanding our teens. It's important for adults to consider the physical differences between their brain and the brain of their child, and how the differing brain structures can both clash and compliment each other.



*NOTE: As helpful as this information is for the parent to know when navigating tricky conversations, be mindful of how you communicate this science to your teen. Allow them to feel empowered by the elasticity and potential of their teenage brain without feeling put down or lessened by being told their brain isn't "developed enough" to make good decisions.*

## THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE

Here are **five** recommendations for language used when discussing T1D. Try language that:

- 1. Is strengths-based and imparts hope.**
  - Focus on what's working, rather than what's wrong. Empowering a child's strengths encourages them to engage with new challenges.
- 2. Is collaborative.**
  - Though it may not always feel like it, you and your child are on the same team.
  - Replace phrases like "you need to..." or "you should..." with thoughts like "how can I support you?" and "let's work together to..."
- 3. Is neutral, nonjudgmental, and based on facts.**
  - Rather than saying, "your blood sugar is good/bad", refer to the numbers themselves.
    - You can provide further, nonjudgmental context such as "that's higher than the target we talked about of x mmol/L".
- 4. Makes space for the emotional impact of T1D.**
  - Whether intentional or unintentional, words carry weight for people living with T1D. Work with your child to identify words or phrases they find stigmatic, and brainstorm alternatives to use instead.
  - The burden of T1D feels different every day. Try asking "How heavy is your T1D backpack today?" to gauge the level of diabetes distress. Some days feel like you're carrying a laptop, and some feel like a bag full of bricks.
- 5. Focuses on actions, not personality.**
  - Help your child know that they are greater than their highs and lows.

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## COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Offering feedback and direction is a necessary part of parenting, but it can also open the door for misunderstandings and conflict. Here are some tips to consider when approaching important conversations about diabetes management with adolescents and young adults:

1	<b>Pause before you give feedback</b>	<b>Ask yourself...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's my goal with this feedback? Is it a complaint?</li> <li>• Is it productive and necessary? What would happen if I said nothing?</li> </ul> Use the <b>Talking With Your Teen - Worksheet</b> to help with this!
2	<b>Try serving up a 'feedback sandwich'</b>	Bookend constructive criticism with positive feedback, including praise, compliments, and acknowledgements of previous successes and current efforts..
3	<b>Practice active listening</b>	Listen without interrupting and focus on what is said rather than how you will respond. Paraphrase what is shared to both seek clarification and demonstrate that value their perspective and want to understand better.
4	<b>Ask open-ended questions</b>	Avoid 'yes' and 'no' questions to invite your child to share more about their thoughts and feelings. eg. <i>"How are you feeling?"</i> rather than <i>"Are you feeling okay?"</i>
5	<b>Encourage independence</b>	Give your child space and freedom to make their own decisions, and be there if they need help dealing with the outcome. This will show that you trust them and increase their self-confidence.
6	<b>Model desired behaviour</b>	Modelling desired behaviour creates consistency and a shared sense of responsibility. Promote accountability by being accountable.
7	<b>Ask for permission</b>	Acknowledge the burden discussing T1D can have on your child. To foster collaboration, check-in with them about the timing of conversations and the topics before starting (unless it is an emergency situation). eg. <i>"I have some information that could be helpful. How open are you to hearing it?"</i>



**Remember: You want your child to feel like they are the hero of their story, with you as their sidekick.**