



easily between mothers and daughters, one of the closest of all female relationships. Why, then, is mother/daughter communication so difficult, frustrating and painful?

The connection between mothers and daughters is powerful and unique: They are the same gender; live together; share common experiences; are a lot alike and also very different. Mothers look at their daughters and see their legacy, dreams and hopes ("please learn from my mistakes"). Daughters look at their mothers and see their heritage, their future and qualities to keep and reject ("I'll never be like her"). Those strong ties that bind can also end up choking communication.

Although mother/daughter communication problems can start as soon as a daughter can speak, they are more likely to begin in early adolescence. Part of the challenge is that "females communicate on a different level than males," says Audrey Nelson, Ph.D., communication consultant and speaker. "Mother/daughter communication happens on a more intimate level regarding feelings, emotions, relationships and insecurities." If a mother isn't equipped to handle these differences, bad patterns develop that can last a lifetime.

According to Roslyn Cantrell, Ph.D., licensed marriage and family therapist, communication problems occur when there's a lack of respect from either side, listening stops, one becomes judgmental, or the mother pushes her ideas onto the daughter or gives unsolicited advice.

Teenage stress levels add to the mix. "Adolescents today are under a lot of pressure regarding drugs, alcohol, sex and the push to succeed," says Cantrell. Combine all of that with

a girl trying to become her own person, and communicating effectively with Mom isn't likely to happen.

"I just think it's very sad and ironic," says Shelly Blake, mother of four daughters ages 9 to 17. "At the very time when a girl needs guidance most from her mother regarding the things she will need to know in life, she's too busy rejecting her mother to listen. It makes me worried for my daughters. I know I'm supposed to let them learn from their mistakes, but it also seems like my duty to try to save them from SOME of that pain."

How is a mother to know whether communication issues are a real problem or just typical teenage stuff? After all, it is normal to have some communication problems in any relationship. Cantrell cites indicators such as tension between the mother and daughter; behavioral changes, such as the daughter spending more time in her room or by herself; lots of yelling and screaming; uncomfortable silence that can be cut with a knife; and daughters regularly saying that they don't want to talk.

Throughout these trying times, a mother has to maintain a tricky balance between making sure she remains a source of guidance in her daughter's life, while letting her figure out who she is as an individual. "The most volatile and potentially damaging situation is a mother who cannot transition to equal footing and realize a daughter is not dependent and has other sources of influence on her (like her friends)," says Nelson.

"Your daughter is not dependent on you at 2 like she is at 20 or 40. Healthy relationships are where the mother attempts to empower rather than develop a co-dependency relationship. She does not want her daughter afraid to venture out to make her own decisions, mistakes and learn from them. She trusts in her daughter's ability to find answers and not always provide them. As her daughter gets older, a mother is simply another person to test her own decision-making abilities. But her mother lets her take the lead," Nelson adds.

Jean Smythe supported and embraced her daughters' independence as they grew up. The mother of two daughters now in their 20s, Smythe says "as difficult as it was, I tried to remember that I was the adult and therefore had to take the high road and set the tone for our communication. Still, there were many times I would have gladly sold my teenage daughters to the highest bidder! Once the girls were out on their own, a miraculous thing happened: They both matured and realized that I'd actually been right about a lot of things over the years."

Both of Smythe's daughters have since apologized to their mother for the years of bad behavior and communication problems. "Hearing those apologies made all the years of fighting, mouthing off and disobedience worthwhile — well, almost!" laughs Smythe. "Although it's not perfect, we now share a more mature, enjoyable relationship that is based on the experiences we share as adults."

Not all communication problems disappear when the