Ohio Chapter
INCORPORATED IN OHIO
American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

Ohio Department of Health

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR TEEN IN MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS

If you have a teen who is struggling with making difficult decisions in their life, a strategy called motivational interviewing can be helpful. Below are some tips and tricks you can try when using motivational interviewing as you talk to your child.

AVOID THE RIGHTING REFLEX!

As a caregiver, it's important for you to give advice. Advice is usually received best if you ask for permission first. If you would like to give your child advice, try asking:

- Would you like to hear my thoughts?
- Can I share another perspective?

Sometimes advice is not what your child is looking for and it is important to avoid what is known as the **righting reflex.** The righting reflex is what happens when we offer advice to someone who is experiencing ambivalence (the feeling of being stuck between two or more choices). If someone is conflicted about a decision, advice often causes them to defend the other side. The process of defending the other side is known as the righting reflex.

Instead of offering advice, try one of the following strategies when having a discussion with your child:

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

An open-ended question allows a person to answer openly, usually with more than a one-word answer. Open-ended questions fuel conversation and prompt the other person to think more deeply about the topic at hand.

An open-ended question might sound like:

- What do you like about each university?
- Tell me more about the options that you have.

Great open-ended questions start with:

- What…
- How…
- Tell me more about…
- Help me understand…

AFFIRMATIONS

Affirmations let someone know what strengths we are seeing. Affirmations help strengthen someone's confidence, allowing them to build on their strengths to overcome a difficult situation. They might sound like:

- I can tell that you are really putting a lot of thought into making the right decision for you.
- I can see you are working really hard.

REFLECTIONS

We can use reflections to "reflect" or repeat back to the person what we are hearing them say. We can reflect exact words, or what we think they are trying to say. You don't have to worry about getting it exactly right. Most people will respond with a correction if the reflection doesn't quite match what they are trying to say.

Reflection might sound like:

- It seems like you feel really strongly about quitting your job, but you are torn because you really like having extra money.
- It sounds like what you really like about vaping is feeling like you can fit in with you friends.

SUMMARY

By summarizing all the information you've heard, you can condense information and highlight important points.

Summaries can sound like:

- So far, I have heard you talk about how important it is for you to be with your friends and how difficult it is to focus on class when you sit by them because they are talking a lot during work time. This is causing you to see a drop in your grade, and that is feeling pretty frustrating.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER!

You don't have to use each tool in every conversation. You can mix and match based on how the conversation is going. Your goal is to help your child learn the skills of making difficult decisions.

Your child might not be ready to make a decision at the end of the conversation. That is ok! Allow your child sometime to reflect on your conversation.

REMEMBER:

Another important part of this process is letting your child manage the consequences of their choice. This is an important life skill. As long as the consequence is not likely to be life threatening or significantly life altering, it is okay to let your child face the consequences that come with making decisions.

For more information, please visit:
https://tinyurl.com/29ta2dhr