

Dad loses touch, wants daughter to meet his new wife-to-be

Yvette:

I'm the divorced dad of a 15-1/2-year-old girl whom I've increasingly lost touch with ever since her mom remarried. She lives with her mom and stepdad.

How do I remain in touch without acting like a pest? I sure love and miss her.

My daughter was too busy to meet my out-of-state girlfriend when we tried to arrange a meeting. Now it's likely that I'm going to marry my girlfriend and move to her community. I would've preferred that my daughter met my fiance when my fiance and I made the effort. Now it's looking like my daughter won't know my wife-to-be before my wedding.

What do I do to keep things open and to keep my daughter feeling secure about things?

George

George:

A teenage girl has an active life and is typically self-absorbed by her needs and wants. If you have "increasingly lost touch" with your daughter over the years, you can't blame her for not dropping everything to fit into your schedule with your fiancé. You didn't say how long you've been dating your future wife. Surely there has to be more than one opportunity for your daughter to meet her before the wedding.

The bottom line is: You are the adult. You should take the steps necessary to stay connected to your daughter — even when she seems disinterested. Every parent struggles with remaining connected to a teenager. The challenge is greater when you don't live in the same home or the same community. The effort begins and continues with you.

Families are encouraged to send their parenting questions concerning their children's challenging or difficult behavioral issues to Brown at columbusparent@thisweeknews.com or *Columbus Parent Magazine*, 7801 N. Central Dr., Lewis Center, OH 43035.

If you move forward with marrying your fiancé without your daughter having at least met her, be prepared for some animosity from your daughter.

Yvette

Yvette:

I have a wonderful daughter, 15, who seems to have taken up lying quite a bit. I have tried grounding, taking away the cell phone, etc., but she seems not to have learned much. Any advice you can give would be appreciated.

Shell

Shell:

Sometimes teenagers lie because they don't feel like they have adequate freedom to be with their friends. It's time to have a conversation with your daughter about why she lies.

If she's craving more freedom or independence, see if there are things you can do to meet her halfway. However, she should understand that lying won't be tolerated and the consequences will continue to escalate until she understands how important this is to you. Explain that trust is hard to get and easy to lose.

Tell her that you want to trust her and give her freedom to be with her friends but in return you must know you can count on her to be honest about where she is and what she is

doing. If grounding and taking away the cell phone aren't working, the discipline periods may need to be longer or she doesn't care enough about going out and using her cell phone.

Find her sweet spot and enforce the consequences. She'll want to learn to drive soon; driving is a huge privilege, not a right. If she can't be honest, then driving will have to wait. Keep reinforcing your standards. Discipline works when the consequences are sure and the discipline is consistent.

Yvette

Yvette:

What can be done for a 14-year-old talented, smart young woman who doesn't care about school or herself? She feels she doesn't understand the schoolwork and won't ask for help. When teachers or parents try to help or talk to her, she says they're picking on or preaching to her.

She is counseled once a month, but it doesn't seem to help. What can we do? Is there someplace to take her to open her eyes to the opportunity of learning and love?

Mrs. R. E. Smith

Mrs. Smith:

This talented young woman may be suffering from a learning disability or a mild form of depression. You indicate she is in counseling. Is this with a therapist or a school counselor? If she

hasn't had a mental-health assessment, I strongly suggest one. From the limited information you have provided, I believe she could benefit from a professional assessment.

Please don't give up. There's a reason she doesn't feel valued. Once you find the reason, you can develop a plan.

Yvette

Yvette:

How do parents openly discuss sexual issues with teenagers in regard to abstinence and safety?

Anita

Anita:

Our staff recommends a book called *Boundaries: A Guide for Teens* by Peter and Dowd. It's a good way to begin the conversation.

Look for other ways to keep the conversation going in a nonthreatening way. Discuss movies or current events to convey your thoughts on sexual issues and behavior without judgment. You will find that open dialogue goes a long way in helping teenagers work through difficult issues.

Believe it or not, teenagers do value their parents' opinions. The key is to give them the information in a way that allows them to form their own opinion. Teenagers learn from our values and how we live. Keep talking and modeling the behavior you want her to learn.

Yvette



Yvette McGee Brown is a former Domestic Relations/Juvenile Court Judge. She is currently the president of the Center for Child and Family Advocacy at Columbus Children's Hospital.