So it's time for you to sit down and have a face-to-face chat with your teenage son. Actually, there might be a better option.

The public service announcements on television make it sound like the best approach is to just start a conversation about drugs or alcohol at the breakfast table. But most teenagers would just roll their eyes—and probably tune you out.

Getting your teenage son to talk with you can be one of the greatest challenges of your fathering career, but it is doable. How do you bridge the gap? Let's look at three suggestions.

The first one is a paradox: to get your teenage son to talk, **don't try to get him to talk**. Sure, face-to-face chats are great if you can pull 'em off. But usually, the best approach is to talk sideways. A teenage boy will talk to you much more easily while you're working on a project together or doing something fun.

So enlist his help as you work on the car; shoot some hoops; hang drywall; run errands together; join him in something he wants to do. Suddenly, he'll bring up something that's been on his mind or willingly respond to a question you throw out.

Second, **watch for cues that he's ready to talk**. For example, if he's had enough sleep, that will probably make a big difference. Or, maybe he talks more at a certain time of the day, or when he's in a particular mood. The cues may be subtle, but you can learn to spot them.

Third, **be available**. He may have a pressing question at eleven o'clock at night—or at three in the morning. His concerns may sound

hair-brained or trivial or way off the mark. That's okay, dad. Be flexible. Let him know that he can come to you anytime, about anything. Those times may be rare, so be ready. And put aside the newspaper or turn off the TV when it happens.

And finally, **a word for dads who don't yet have a teenager**. Build a close relationship with your son now. If it's easy for him to talk to you during these younger years, there won't be a gap to bridge, and that will do a lot to ease the strain once you have a teenager.