January 2018

What’s in this issue…

Communicating your strategy: effectively sharing your strategic plan
Help your community embrace your strategic planning process by building a communications plan into the process to explain the vision and goals you are setting. Sharing information and gathering feedback throughout the process will help you build a more effective plan.

Do you practice two-way communication?
Schools need to communicate all year long, but often that means talking at rather than communicating with our communities. Read tips for building goodwill and trust through two-way communications.

How smaller districts handle communications
Smaller districts have most of the same communications needs that large districts have with fewer staff members who can do the work. Read how some districts are prioritizing projects to reach the most people effectively. And read rules for using interns to help.

Tips for media interviews: It’s what you say and how you say it
How you respond to questions during media interviews can impact public perception of your district. For negative news issues, provide just the facts. Save the statements about your feelings for good news stories or tragedies.

Here’s to You!
Tips for your good health
This issue has information about heart disease and prevention, stress reduction, and healthy food.

Insights for Parents: Teen tips
Raising kids is hard. There isn’t just one way to be a good parent, but there is a wealth of advice by child experts online. Read tips to avoid the most common mistakes for your tween and teen, and learn general tips to help you be successful.
COMMUNICATING YOUR STRATEGY: EFFECTIVELY SHARING YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic planning can be a complex and lengthy process. With all of the goal setting, visioning, and work on metrics, communicating publicly about this plan is generally not at the top of the priority list. But maybe it should be. Having staff, parents, and community members buy-in to your strategic plan – and the visions and goals you lay out – can be immensely helpful as you start to implement your activities and initiatives. With a little forethought, your strategic plan can be a valuable communications and engagement tool.

Why is it so important to publicly share your strategic plan? Part of it is transparency and accountability. By publicly stating our goals, objectives, and measurement plans, we invite people to examine our progress and help hold us accountable. But on a more basic level, our strategic plan should describe what we are all about. Where are we today, where do we want to go, and how will we know if we are making progress? It is the roadmap for our journey of growth and improvement. By sharing this roadmap, we invite our staff, parents, and community members to join that journey, contribute to our growth, and celebrate our improvements.

Think communications from the beginning

Rather than waiting until you have a completed strategic plan to start thinking about your communications strategy, connect the two. Include a communications representative in your strategic planning team. This can be a communications professional or simply a staff member who will view the work through a communications-focused lens. By thinking about communications throughout the process, you can make communicating the end result much easier and more effective.

A few things to keep in mind as you go through the strategic planning process include:

**Vision** – Is there a clear, compelling, student-centered vision with aligned goals, activities, and metrics? Is the vision simple enough to easily describe in a few words?

**Audience** – Who are your key internal and external audiences (staff, parents, board members, community members, students, etc.) and how does each connect to this plan and your overall vision? What does each audience need to know and when? How often should you keep them informed of developments and progress (both during the planning stage and once you start implementing the strategy)? Are there questions or concerns these audiences would have about the strategy that should be considered before rolling it out?

**Language** – As you start developing the plan, make sure the language stays simple and clear. Avoid jargon. Keep sentences short and easy to follow. Make sure that the vision, goals, and objectives are particularly clear and memorable. Can you easily remember all of the key goals without looking at notes? If not, it might be helpful to simplify things.
Build in feedback gathering

Once the plan is drafted, find ways to gather feedback. This can be as simple as having a few trusted representatives from each audience group review the draft and give input. Or it can be a larger process such as a focus group or town hall-style discussion. There is generally value in hearing honest feedback from people outside of your leadership team about the proposed plan.

Keep track of the feedback you received and the ways you addressed concerns or questions. This will help ensure your plan is inclusive of diverse community and stakeholder viewpoints. This transparency will also help when you start to communicate out about your plan and its development process. Sharing how you adjusted the plan based on feedback can help to diffuse opposition or resistance from internal or external stakeholders.

Communicating your final plan

Once your plan is finished, make sure it is easily accessible to your staff and stakeholders. Below are a few ideas to help communicate effectively about your strategic plan:

**Provide an executive summary** – If your strategic plan is more than a few pages long, provide a clear, simple executive summary where people can learn the main points of the plan without wading through all of the details. Most stakeholders won’t be interested in each and every metric and milestone, but they will be interested in the vision and key goals or objectives.

**Make it visual** – If possible, provide a graphic or visual of some kind to go along with the strategic plan. This can be a timeline, a visual representation of your mission or core values, or some other creative way to make your plan more dynamic. See the Hillsboro School District 2016-21 Strategic Plan for one example: [www.hsd.k12.or.us/Page/189](http://www.hsd.k12.or.us/Page/189).

**Distribute through multiple channels** – As people gather information in different ways, make sure your strategic plan can be accessed in a number of formats and avenues. These should include posting online (with a clear link from your district home page or another prominent online location), featuring information on the plan in publications and newsletters (with a link to the online version), and offering hard copy versions at your schools and district office. Other possible communications channels include taping a short leadership video about the new strategic plan and its importance to the future of the district or holding a community or staff meeting to share the finished plan.

**Ensure language accessibility** – Have the plan translated into any languages commonly used by families in your district to ensure all parents and community members have access.

**Encourage active participation in the plan** – Provide ways that parents and community members can support the vision and goals of the strategic plan through local actions. Make sure staff know how their work directly connects to the goals of the plan.

Gina Patterson, Executive Director Virginia School Boards Association (800) 446-8722 gina@vsba.org
Ongoing communications

In communicating about your strategic plan, it may be helpful to use a framework such as the Inspire/Educate/Reinforce framework. To begin with, you will want to focus on exciting your audience and getting buy-in. This inspire element should be used at the beginning of your communications plan and whenever you are communicating about any significant accomplishments or progress toward goals. Your education messages, explaining more of the nuts and bolts of your plan, will be much more effective once you have inspired and energized your audience.

Finally, you will need to reinforce this message over the coming months and years. The rule of seven states that people need to hear your message at least seven times before it sinks in. Weave strategic plan messaging into other communications to show alignment between the plan and your day-to-day work. Provide regular reports showing progress toward stated goals and objectives. Share success stories aligned to your strategic plan. Short, regular reminders of how your strategic plan is guiding your work can be a powerful tool to keep your communities engaged and supportive.

Resources:

- Effectively Communicate Strategy: https://onstrategyhq.com/resources/video-how-to-effectively-communicate-your-strategy/
- How to Share and Get Feedback About Your Strategy: www.executestrategy.net/blog/how-to-share-and-get-feedback-about-your-strategy/
- 3 Steps to Launch and Communicate Your Strategy: www.executestrategy.net/blog/3-steps-to-launch-and-communicate-your-strategy/

DO YOU PRACTICE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION?

Schools need to communicate with their communities all year long, in good times and in bad. But too often, we interpret “communicate” to mean “talk at.” We get so busy dispensing information to our parents and other patrons that we fail to have a conversation with them. And conversations build relationships.

Two-way communication is a critical tool in building trust and goodwill with patrons. When patrons feel invested in their district, they want an opportunity to give you feedback in ways that they know you’re hearing it. Sometimes an email will do, but often they want to look at you eye-to-eye and actually have a dialogue over their budget concerns or about why they think the start times need changing.
What is two-way communication?

There's no "one size fits all" when it comes to communications, so a well-rounded communications plan includes different options, including some that allow for dialogue.

Facebook is an example. It is a great tool for sharing photos and short tidbits about what’s happening in classrooms. Parents not only love to see and read them but also to add their comments. Surveys – especially those administered electronically – are another great way to receive feedback from parents.

At the heart of any communication plan is relationship building, and that happens best through face-to-face encounters with actual conversation. This is not about talking at people, but engaging them in a conversation and hopefully involving them in some way in your schools.

How do you do two-way communication?

So what does that look like? Any communication that allows for input, dialogue or comments that someone hears.

Many districts find great success with a Superintendent’s Advisory Council. These councils are generally composed of 25-30 district parents, both supporters and Negative Nellies. This is a place where you can pose a question and get feedback about important issues. It can be immensely helpful to get a thumbs up from this group before you roll out a new curriculum or before you launch a new district initiative. It can be equally helpful to hear from them all the reasons that new initiative is a bad idea or that it needs more work before you launch it. Every meeting should include a few minutes where members talk about their concerns and what they’re seeing and hearing in the schools.

Superintendent Listening Sessions are another way to dialogue with parents and community members. These are informal meetings where the superintendent invites participants to come and just chat about topics of interest to them. It’s important when holding these sessions to abide by the name – listening sessions. They are not intended as a forum for the superintendent or staff to make a formal presentation. Rather, they are an opportunity for the superintendent to make connections with parents, visit informally and hear what’s on their mind.

Many communities have monthly gatherings for community leaders, usually over breakfast or lunch. This is a great way to build relationships with community leaders, informally share information and concerns and seek advice and feedback.

Another effective way to build relationships is through participation in civic organizations, such as Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce. Enlist some of your school/district administrators and even school board members to take part. By interacting with community members at these meetings, you are helping them put a face on the district. Make periodic presentations to these groups and include time for questions and comments. Brag about your career technical programs and increasing your graduation rate. Give them an inside look into the good things happening in your schools.
One of the easiest avenues for two-way communications with parents is to attend school events such as football games and band concerts and just be accessible. Chat with the parent standing in the concession line. Visit with the folks sitting next to you.

**Don’t forget your staff**

Communicating with staff is one of the most important things a superintendent and district office can do, but often that communication is one-way. You send out an announcement or perhaps an email and get feedback via scuttlebutt. A way to build better relationships with staff is to meet with them regularly.

Some superintendents have tried this idea with good results: Invite a small group of random staff (a mix of teachers and classified staff) to meet over coffee and doughnuts. Spend a few minutes bringing them up to date on important things happening in the district but devote most of the time to hearing from the staff. Ask each one to share their concerns or talk about things in their school they feel good about. It’s a way to hear directly from staff about how things are going, and, often, get a heads up about issues you should be aware of.

Communication is a big job, but it becomes a lot easier when parents feel you are willing to listen. The key is to choose a few effective strategies and keep doing them. After all, communication is an ongoing process, not an event where you do it one time and you’re done.

_Contribute by Connie Potter, communications consultant_

---

**HOW SMALLER DISTRICTS HANDLE COMMUNICATIONS**

In an era of increasing communication needs, smaller districts find themselves at an impasse. They need more communications professionals – but at the same budget.

Timothy Winters, superintendent of Clarkston School District in Clarkston, Wash., points out that in the past, children simply attended the school in their own attendance boundaries. “Those days are gone,” he said. With only 2,600 students, Clarkston has to work to keep those students happy and win over new students as well.

“We’re in a unique situation where we have a school district down the road,” he explained. “When new people come to the community, they have to decide which side of the valley to live in. Marketing our schools to our parents and our communities is a very positive thing.”

**More communication means more resources, not less**

Winters said one of their communications solutions was to hire a dedicated video production person. “We just started dabbling in video last year and we decided through research and experience that video was the best way to reach our parents and community.”

The Centralia School District is also committing more resources to communication. This year they made their part-time communications coordinator a full-time employee. “We were launching a bond campaign and I needed him,” explained Superintendent Mark Davalos. The campaign was successful, “and now that we’re actually building schools I need him even more!”
Should I use a social media intern?

Pressed for resources, some districts are looking at the idea of hiring a social media intern. This is a risky proposition. With an unpaid intern, you are putting your district at risk for a sudden lapse in communications when your intern takes a full-time position elsewhere, and you also face the loss of that knowledge and the arc of learning that now has to be duplicated with their replacement.

Additionally, there are clear guidelines about the “limited circumstances” that allow use of unpaid interns, and schools are not excluded from the limitations. “If the interns are engaged in the operations of the employer or are performing productive work that benefits the employer (for example, filing, performing other clerical work, or assisting customers), then interns may be entitled to the benefits provided under the wage and hour laws, even if they also derive other benefits from this type of placement.” [http://bit.ly/2iPoqjq](http://bit.ly/2iPoqjq)

The attached fact sheet lays out the labor requirements for an internship, but the basic sniff test says if you are using an unpaid intern to do the work of the school, or you find yourself thinking, “Thank goodness for our intern – I don’t know how we’d be able to do this without him!” then you are treading in very dangerous waters.

Communicate every day, not just in emergencies

Smaller school districts have historically used newsletters to reach their community, and only stepped it up to more active communications during emergencies, such as during a strike or other school shutdown. What those districts find, though, is that the community relationship they need to rely on in those emergencies simply isn’t there.

Some districts are at the forefront of trying to change that dynamic.

“We weren’t doing a good job of telling the story or the collection of stories about our true mission of educating kids and being effective educators,” said Davalos. “Having a successful communications person helps tell our story of our purpose as a learning organization. I think we’ve done a good job in shifting our focus from reactive reporting to leading the stories and selecting the ones that inform the work that we’re really doing,” he said.

This proactive work pays off in happy boards and parents, and successful bond campaigns.

How small school districts handle day-to-day news

One area that small school districts have to carefully allocate resources to is how they share unscheduled news, such as a student winning a major scholastic scholarship or a teacher being commended for national honors.

When Centralia has good news to share, “we talk about how to capture the story.” says Davalos.

“Our communications guy is very rarely in his office,” explains Davalos. “He’s out soliciting stories.” When he was first hired, teachers were suspicious of him asking so many questions, and he really had to build their trust. “People have seen that how he reports the stories supports the work they’re doing in the classrooms. Now, if something is exciting they’ll go directly to him – and he’ll come to me. We’re always collaborating on how to tell our stories.”
The Clarkston School District is using social media more actively in their attempts to share daily news. They used to do a quarterly newsletter, and this year they ceased that. “We’re finding there are more people than we thought on Facebook,” Winters explains. They haven’t completely abandoned traditional outreach: they had a flyer that went out about their bond, and they utilized their local television station to run district promotional commercials, which was made easier by having video production in-house.

**More communication in the future? Or less?**

“It would be tough to go back to not having communications staff,” said Davalos. “So much of education is people being able to hear how things are going. Parent-teacher conferences aren’t always the best place to have that conversation because each student has their own individual needs that we’re working on there.”

Unlike districts like Clarkston that are actively engaging via social media, Centralia is treading lightly where non-school platforms are concerned. “We prefer to do the business of parents and kids in a controlled environment where it’s very clear that people need to follow the rules of school-based communications,” explained Davalos. The district does use social media to distribute one-way ‘information-out’ situations. “In an emergency, a lockdown for instance, you have to use every method to get the information out.”

But Davalos says that even in those situations, he prefers to guide concerned parents back to the school’s website to get the full details where they won’t be subject to misinformation. “It’s important that we always use our incident command protocols to put out regular updates to the facts, and hopefully people learn to look for those outlets for the real information.”

Above all, small districts are always looking for new ways to stretch those communication dollars in support of education.

“Communication is an important tool in education,” says Winters. “We’re learning as we go and always welcome opportunities to learn from others.”

*Contributed by Megan J. Wilson, a Los Angeles-based freelance writer and communications consultant*
TIPS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS:
IT’S WHAT YOU SAY AND HOW YOU SAY IT

We all want to say something interesting when we speak, but sometimes boring is better. When you are the subject of a news media interview about something negative, your choice of words can make the difference between a one-day story and a long, drawn-out series of stories. In choosing words for the news media, the key is to take the excitement out and leave the information in. Transparency without undue emotion is the goal when dealing with anything other than a tragic situation.

Don’t make the situation worse

There is always plenty of emotion in any story about a school or school district. Because children are so important, people are passionate about almost every aspect of education. But that passion can sometimes cloud people’s sense of reason and make an otherwise straightforward situation more difficult and time consuming than it needs to be.

Reporters will try to get you to describe any incident or issue in the most provocative or emotional words possible. And the key tactic they use is to bait you by inserting the interesting or provocative words into their question so you respond with those words in your answer.

We all get nervous with a camera or tape recorder in our face. Reporters know this, and they also know that by putting certain words into their question, they are encouraging you to repeat them in your answer. This holds true even when you deny their premise. If someone is nervous and is asked, “What are you hiding?,” the smart money would bet on them saying, “I’m not hiding anything.” It is just human nature to repeat the easy, obvious words when you are nervous. Never repeat the inflammatory words in a question, even to deny the premise.

Don’t say how you are feeling – talk about what you are doing

So why would reporters try to get emotional or inflammatory words out of you? Why would they not leave it to you to just say what you think or feel? Because provocative sells. They are looking for words that will draw the
audience in, whether it be in print or video. Words like “shocking,” “devastated” and “worried” are much more likely to grab readers than words like “unexpected,” “disappointed” and “vigilant.”

Take, for instance, a school threat. Perhaps it was found scrawled on a desk or bathroom stall. At one end of the emotional spectrum are people who don’t care at all or who even think such a disruption is funny. And on the other end of the spectrum are the people who are flat-out hysterical with fear that their children will be hurt. The key is to move everyone to the middle, where they should be – concerned, but not worried. And you can do that by choosing the right words to set the correct tone with the media.

If a reporter asks you whether you are worried about safety in light of the threat, you should reply, “we take all safety concerns seriously and we are taking many actions to keep everyone safe.” You should neither say you are “worried” or “not worried.” If you say, “sure we are worried like anyone would be, but we are taking precautions,” the media can say you are worried and leave the rest out. If you say, “we are not worried because we are taking precautions,” the media can say you are not worried and leave the rest out. Either way, you risk generating more emotions among the parents and general community by playing into the emotion of using the term “worry.” Simply avoid it. Don’t say how you are feeling. Just talk about what you are doing.

Take the case of a student who is arrested for a serious crime. A common media question is whether school officials are “shocked” to hear about the alleged crimes. Many people would rise to the bait and repeat the term “shocked” in their response. Of course the reporter will not say that you repeated his or her term. They will just run your quote in their story or headline as though it were your authentic reaction to the news. A better response would be along these lines: “of course you never expect to hear something like this about one of your students, but we have a lot of work to do keeping everyone focused on getting back to normal, so we can teach and learn.” So you have changed the focus from a school district in shock, to a school district dealing with an “unexpected” situation. Which will allow you to get back to normal quicker?

Share your feelings about good news

So, when do you want to use emotionally charged or provocative words? When sharing good news. When you want the media to report on something, you need to give them something interesting to share. And while a certain student, event or program might be interesting to you, it is not realistic to expect everyone else to see the excitement without your words showing them.

Educators use a lot of jargon with each other, which is fine for sharing in a professional setting. But when you are trying to get the news media, parents or community members excited about something, leave the jargon in your office. Speak in simple, emotional, relatable terms that will get you quoted.

Instead of saying “We are applying rigor with fidelity,” say “Kids are smart. They can handle tough classes.” Which is most likely to be quoted in a story about why your students are scoring better on state tests?

Express your sadness during tragedies

The other time to let emotion into your media relations is in the case of a tragedy. When a student’s life is lost, you can say staff members are feeling “shocked and sad” because the emotional reality of the situation is already obvious. In the case of a student losing their life or being seriously hurt, your words should match the emotions of the school community and the parents.
But when the news is bad and you are trying to keep your school or your district focused on teaching and learning, keep the words simple, non-emotional and, well, kind of boring. Your goal is to choose your words carefully and avoid letting the media get you to say things that will make a bad situation even worse. Keep the information in and the emotions out when the news is negative.

*Contributed by Jay Remy, communications consultant*

**HERE’S TO YOU!**

**Take steps to protect your heart**

**Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the U.S.**

Heart disease is a serious problem in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 610,000 people die of heart disease in the U.S. every year – that’s one in four deaths.

The numbers are worse for women - one in three women’s deaths are caused by heart disease and stroke. That’s approximately one death every 80 seconds. [http://bit.ly/2jc8UL4](http://bit.ly/2jc8UL4)

The statistics are scary, but medical experts believe that 80 percent of heart disease and stroke events can be prevented through lifestyle changes.

**Preventing heart disease**

Lifestyle choices have a big impact on heart health and longevity and can help ensure that cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar are normal.

**Key factors include:**

- **Healthy diet.** Low-fat, low-cholesterol and high-fiber foods are healthy foods. See p. 2 for more information.
- **Healthy weight.** Measure your body mass index (BMI) or calculate waist and hip measurements. Find calculators online or try this one: [http://bit.ly/2jb2tIb](http://bit.ly/2jb2tIb)
- **Physical activity.** The recommended amount is two hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week for adults.
- **Not smoking.** Cigarette smoking increases your risk for heart disease.
- **Limiting alcohol.** Alcohol can raise blood pressure. Men should have no more than two drinks per day; women no more than one.

**Lower your stress and anxiety, increase your heart health**

Stress can raise blood pressure and has been linked to changes in the way blood clots, which makes a heart attack more likely.
It is not a small problem. One in five Americans suffers from anxiety, and women are twice as likely to suffer as men.

The American Heart Association recommends four techniques to relieve stress that include:
1. Positive self-talk
2. Emergency stress stoppers for immediate relief.
3. Finding pleasure or distraction in things you enjoy.

**Eat healthy to live longer**

Eating a healthy diet is one of the most important ways to maintain good health. Don’t let your diet suffer because you don’t think you have the time or money to eat well.

Build your diet around these guidelines based on dietary surveys from the world’s longest-lived people conducted by The Blue Zones Project. [http://bit.ly/2kjjJu1Q]

**95/5 rule:** Eat mostly plants. Ninety-five percent of your food should be fruits, vegetables, grains, greens, beans, and fruits.

**Limit meat:** Think of meat as a celebratory food. Portions should be no larger than a deck of cards, once or twice a week. Avoid processed meats such as hot dogs, bacon and sausages.

**Fish is fine:** Enjoy fish up to three times weekly. Wild-caught salmon or smaller fish like sardines, trout, snapper, cod and anchovies are okay choices.

**Diminish dairy:** Avoid dairy when possible. If cheese is a must, try ice-cube size portions to flavor foods. If you eat eggs, limit intake to three times per week.

**Daily dose of beans:** Eat a cup of beans daily spread out across breakfast, lunch or dinner. All beans count, including tofu. They contain high-quality protein and fiber. If you buy canned beans, avoid added salt, sugar and chemicals.

**Slash sugar:** Consume only 28 grams (seven teaspoons) of added sugar daily. Reserve cookies, cakes, and candies for special occasions. Read labels and avoid foods with more than eight grams of sugar. Make honey your go-to sweetener.

**Snack on nuts:** Eat a handful of nuts daily. Try different nuts so you don’t tire of them. Avoid sugar-coated nuts.

**Sour on bread:** Eat only 100 percent whole grain breads or authentic sourdough bread made from live cultures. Limit bread to two slices daily. Chose whole grain corn tortillas over flour tortillas.
Go wholly whole: Try to eat only whole foods or processed foods with fewer than five ingredients: If it’s manufactured in a plant, avoid it. If it comes from a plant, eat it.

Drink mostly water: Drink six glasses of water daily. Feel free to drink unsweetened teas and coffee. Enjoy wine with friends. Avoid all sugar-sweetened and diet sodas.

Healthy foods on a budget

New dietary habits may seem difficult enough without worrying about how to pay for new foods.

It’s possible to eat well without spending a fortune. In fact, eating whole foods can be even easier and more cost-effective than a fast or processed diet.

Start with these basics:

- **Peanut butter**
  Inexpensive (around $.43 per serving) and protein heavy

- **Frozen chopped organic spinach**
  Less expensive than fresh and highly versatile

- **Eggs**
  Nutrient dense, easy-to-find and easy-to-make

- **Beans**
  Dried beans are cheapest but require more time to prepare. Canned beans are still inexpensive Beans work in dips, soups and salads.

- **Cabbage**
  Healthy, versatile and one of the most vitamin-dense veggies

- **Lentils**
  Loaded with fiber and about $.13 per serving

- **Oats**
  A comfort food, a kitchen staple and about $.23 per serving
Most people understand that raising kids and teens is hard. The difficulty may vary depending on the child and specific outside influences, but no one would argue about the challenge of the job.

Parents are learning how to do a job that the majority lack training for but sincerely want to do the best job they can for their kids.

There isn’t just one way to be a good parent; however, these tried-and-true tips are useful for almost any family situation.

Avoid the common mistakes
Start with what not to do. These tips from webmd.com help parents transition when their little kids become teens. “Your teen, or tween, will test your limits, and your patience. But they’re still your child. And, though they won’t admit it, they still need you! The key is knowing what efforts are worth it, and which ones backfire.”

www.webmd.com/parenting/features/parenting-mistakes-teens#1

1. Expecting the worst: Negative expectations can actually promote the behavior you fear most. Instead, focus on your child’s interests and hobbies, even if you don’t understand them, which could open communication and help you reconnect with your child.

2. Reading too many parenting books: Relying on advice from experts rather than trusting personal instincts can create anxiety and lower confidence. Books can be helpful if the advice provides a new perspective or is adapted to individual situations.

3. Sweating the small stuff: Children are developing their own identity when they make choices about haircuts and clothes. Their style choices may not appeal to you, but they are important steps to independence. Step back and let them make these low-risk choices without adding critical comments.

4. Ignoring the big stuff: Take action if you suspect your child is using alcohol or drugs. High-risk behavior can have lasting negative consequences. Parents must watch for unexplained changes in behavior, appearance, academic performance and friends and get involved early, especially when kids are between the ages of 13-18, an impressionable time for teens.
5. Too much, or too little, discipline: Parents are sometimes too strict or too lenient when they fear losing control of their kids’ behavior. The key is to find a balance. If the rules are too rigid, teens may rebel and miss out on developing problem solving skills. If they are too lax, kids may feel that they lack safe boundaries as they explore and grow. The best approach is to set up core family values and communicate them.

Grumpy teens
Although every parent was once a teen, adolescent behavior today seems like unfamiliar territory. Why do they challenge rules, talk back or sullenly avoid their parents? The behavior is not unusual, but it is not easy to be on the parent side of things – and many things are different than they were when parents were teens.

Sullen and grumpy teens are normal teens; however, it is easier to respond to teen moods if we understand the motive behind the behavior. According to psychologist Lisa Damour, teens do have good reasons for their moods.

They worry about parent reaction to negative information, which will limit your teen’s interest in talking to you. Try to resist the temptation to scold them for not studying when they tell you they bombed a test. Start with a discussion, not a lecture.

They anticipate negative repercussions. It is important to understand that teens, like all people, make mistakes. A consequence for bad judgment may be warranted, but it can limit lines of communication if teens fear punishment for admitting the error.

They worry that parents will blab. Parents may still feel like sharing the highs and the lows of their children’s lives – like they did when they were young. Repeating what they tell us can be a betrayal that damages their willingness to share again.

http://nyti.ms/2nqiqij

General tips
Parenting teens well is a challenge most parents haven’t been trained for. Parenting experts have a range of advice for how to bridge the gap between challenging teen behavior and good parent intentions. Pick and choose tips to help you from a variety of free guidance on the web. A simple web search for tips for parents of teens will help. These tips are from WebMD:

10 parenting tips for raising teenagers
www.webmd.com/parenting/features/10-parenting-tips-for-raising-teenagers#1

- Give kids some leeway to make choices to help them establish their own identify.
- Choose battles wisely. Purple hair and a messy room don’t matter; permanent choices like self-harm and tattoos do.
- Invite their friends to dinner. Knowing who your teens spends time with – and ensuring that they know you know – can provide an important layer of accountability.
• Be sure that your teen knows the rules in advance, and be sure that your partner is on the same page.
• Discuss check-ins. Parents must know where their children are. If you have trust issues with your teen, have them call during the evening to check in.
• Talk about risks. Don’t assume that your teen knows the worst that could happen from bad choices.
• Give them a game plan. Help them plan how to handle potentially unsafe situations.
• Keep the door open. Make sure they know you will listen when they are ready.
• Let them feel guilty. It is healthy to feel bad when we do the wrong thing. Don’t protect them from those feelings.
• Be a role model. They are watching your actions and listening to your words.