

TO WHOM DO YOU WANT YOUR CHILDREN TO TAKE THEIR PROBLEMS FIRST?

by Peter Ernest Haiman, Ph.D.

When you are with your child and something or someone upsets you, do you tell your youngster how you feel? If not, why not? Do you ever speak with your adolescent regarding the worries you have about a decision you need to make? If you do, great! If not, what keeps you from doing so? How can children be expected to speak with their parents about uncomfortable feelings and problems if their parents do not first talk about some of their own difficulties in front of their children?

Research tells us that the parent is the most important role model in a child's life. Most parents, however, fail to use this influence as effectively as they might in the area of parent-child communications. Very few parents are aware that admitting their own vulnerabilities and weaknesses to their child can be seen by the child or adolescent as a sign of the parent's strength. Most parents feel they must always appear to be strong, right, and without anxieties in front of their children and teenagers. Youth eventually see this facade for what it is: a cover-up of fears and weaknesses. More importantly, in the eyes of a teenager, it is seen as a false self and a lie. When this young person needs an emotionally strong, resilient, and genuine parent upon whom to rely, and with whom to develop and mature, the adolescent senses such a parent is not there for them. This is one reason so many teens feel lost, become depressed, and turn to peers and/or drugs.

Parents must talk with their young children, and especially with teenagers, about the truth that each person has his or her own fears, and each has weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Each person also has strengths. ***A person's awareness of and ability to talk about their concerns, worries, and fears is, in itself, a strength.*** Having these feelings is not a weakness. Every person has them. Weakness is not being able to speak openly and honestly about them.