



Parent Tips

AVOIDING THE BIG 'BUT'

By Jonathan McKee

In a world where I hear parents constantly complaining that their teenagers won't open up and talk with them, perhaps they should consider working on removing their big "but." You've heard it. It's a small word, but it carries a lot of judgment.

"You did a decent job washing the car, BUT..."
"I like your friend Michael, BUT..."

No one likes a big but. Think about when your boss uses the word. She praises you for something, but you can sense it coming... the big but that undoes any praise you heard. A few months ago a mom raised her hand at one of my parent workshops. She said, "My 17-year-old daughter doesn't want to talk with me at all. What can I do to get her to open up to me?" As I dialogued with this mom, I quickly uncovered what most the conversations in this house sounded like:

**"Did you finish your chores? How about your homework?
What time did you get in last night? Were you with that boy Chris again?"**

No wonder this lady's daughter doesn't want to talk. She's afraid of getting in trouble. As parents, we need to avoid becoming a mere parole officer. Don't get me wrong, I'm not insinuating that you let your kids do whatever they want. I'm just suggesting that we offer more encouragement and support than critique.

Think what this looks like in your own home. If someone were writing down every conversation you engaged in with your kids, and categorized them as either "building up" or "correcting"... which category do you favor? Now add the word "but" into the mix.

"I really like your outfit, but your shirt is way too revealing?"

If you feel like you must offer counsel to your teenager, try using the word "and" instead:

"Your outfit looks really cute, and just maybe a little too revealing."

The difference is subtle, but huge. "Buts" communicate judgment and disapproval. Our kids don't need either. What they need even more is encouragement and support. When is the last time you caught your kid doing something right? When is the last time you offered them encouragement? What are some ways you can provide your kids with counsel, without making them feel judged? Do you need to avoid the big but?

JONATHAN MCKEE is the author of over a dozen books including *Get Your Teenager Talking*, *Sex Matters*, and the brand new *More Than Just the Talk*. Jonathan speaks to parents and leaders worldwide. Read more from Jonathan at TheSource4Parents.com