# What to say when your teenager says “Fine.” and shuts the door

*“I ask my fourteen-year-old how her day was, she says “Fine.” and shuts her door, and I end up firing questions through it. What do I say instead?”*

TAKE 1 · THE INSTINCT

“Why won’t you EVER talk to me? What happened?”

TAKE 2 · TRY THIS INSTEAD

“What’s on your mind today? I’m here to listen.”

When a teenager won’t talk, the instinct is to ask more, and ask now. No study listed here says asking is the problem. An accusation and a stack of questions at a shut door is a different thing from a question.

## What is known, and at what age

A “Fine.” at fourteen is ordinary. One study that followed 390 young people from twelve to nineteen found that they told their parents less in early adolescence, girls and boys alike.

What the research links to a teenager telling more is feeling connected. In a study that followed 982 young people over three waves, teens who felt more connected to their parents went on to tell them more, and teens who felt more controlled kept more secrets. In a Dutch study of 497 young teenagers, about thirteen at the start, followed for three years, teens who felt their privacy was invaded had parents who knew less about their lives a year later.

These are links over time, not proof of cause, and the second study measured how intruded on teens felt in general, not questions at a bedroom door.

A review of 32 studies of ten- to eighteen-year-olds found that warmth was the parental strategy most linked, over time, to parents knowing what goes on in their teen’s life.

## What the words do

Take 1 is an accusation (“EVER”) and a demand to talk now. Take 2 is one open question with no pressure on it, and a sentence that says you are available. Say it once, through the door or in passing, and stop.

No study we know of tells you which line will work with your teen. The research does point at the climate: low pressure now, and warmth over time. So the second half matters as much as the line. Be around later: in the kitchen, in the car, with your own door open.

## If you live in two homes

A teenager who moves between two homes may say “Fine.” at both doors, or only at yours. Neither is a verdict on you. Keep the same calm line and the same being-around in your home, and don’t ask your teen to carry messages between homes; pediatricians’ guidance on separation says not to make a child the messenger.

## In the UK

If the quiet lasts, or comes with changes in sleep or mood, your GP is a good place to start. In England and Wales, a child arrangements order may set out who a child lives with and when they spend time with each parent (older orders say “residence” and “contact”). Cafcass in England (Cafcass Cymru in Wales) advises the family court about what is safe for children; for everyday parenting questions, Coram Family Lives (England and Wales, 0808 800 2222) is free and confidential. Nothing on this page is legal advice.

## Sources

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*This is general information drawn from published research and pediatric guidance. It is not medical, psychological or legal advice. If you are worried about your child, talk to your doctor.*