
Connectedness and the “Emotional Bank Account”

Directions

This is a self-guided activity that can be completed by parents, teens or both. It contains five parts and should take about 45 minutes to complete.

Read each part of the activity carefully, since the information you need for completing the written parts of the activity is described there. Take some time to think about your answers. At the end, you will have new skills: 1) a way to measure how close you feel to your parent or teenager, and 2) some ways to keep the relationship emotionally positive and strong!

Part 1

Introduction

Time Required: 3 minutes

We commonly see and hear on TV news or in the newspapers about problems with relationships between parents and teens. The truth is, most teens have good relationships with their parents where they both feel close to each other. When parents and teens feel close to each other, we say they have a good connection, or that they have *connectedness*. We call this **parent-child connectedness**, or “**PCC**.”

However, as teens begin the process of becoming adults, they want to do more things on their own or with their friends, and want to make more of their own decisions. This is all normal and natural, but adjusting to it can be tough for both teens and parents.

During this time, parents and teens often get into conflicts. Read the quotes from parents that show these conflicts from a parent’s perspective:

- “I ask my daughter, ‘What’s wrong? Do you have problems you want to talk about?’ But she remains tight lipped. She says nothing—nothing at all.”
- “I hate the way my daughter dresses...all these little skimpy outfits. She gets dressed for school some days, and I’ll say: ‘What are you wearing? You can’t wear that -- It shows too much skin and those shorts are too short.’ And things like that.”
- “My older son and I are always fighting about chores. He’ll say, ‘I can’t wash these, I can’t do this...’ He wants money, but he doesn’t want to earn it. I get annoyed because he should have some responsibility at this age instead of watching TV and hanging out with his friends on the street.”

Read the quotes from teens that show their point of view:

- “Yeah, my dad when you talk to him about something he starts talking and you can’t even talk. He just talks over and over you.”
- “When I try to talk to my mom, she ignores me. If she’s on the computer or watching TV and I ask her a question or tell her something, she won’t respond but as soon as I walk away, she’ll turn around and say ‘What!?!’”
- “My mother is always getting on me over nothing. Like the other day I was on the phone longer than I was supposed to be and I hadn’t put the trash out. I didn’t think it was a big deal.”

These issues are very real for both sides. So, it’s easy to get so focused on conflicts that you lose sight of the positive things in the relationship. That’s a big mistake. In fact, remembering the positive things in a parent/teen relationship makes it easier to get through the hard times.

The next part of the activity suggests a way of tracking how you feel about your parent-teen relationship. The method is similar to how you keep track of how much money you have in a bank account.

Part 2

Emotional Bank Accounts / Keisha’s Story

Time Required: 20 minutes

All relationships have a kind of imaginary “emotional bank account.”

When you do something to **make another person feel good** about the relationship, you make a **deposit** in their emotional bank account.

When there is **conflict**, the relationship feels less positive. At least one person, and sometimes both people, feels a little less connected to the other. Then we would say that you made a **withdrawal** from the emotional bank account.



As long as the overall total, or “balance,” of your account is positive over time, you will probably feel close, or connected, to the other person.



The story below shows how both parents and teens can do things to make deposits into, or withdrawals out of, each other's emotional bank accounts.

Keisha's Story

Keisha and her mom have always been pretty close. Sometimes after dinner Keisha's mom will ask her to come watch TV with her in her bedroom. So, Keisha crawls into her mom's bed and they watch comedy shows and laugh **(deposit)**. A lot of times they'll talk and Keisha will tell her mom about things happening in her life **(deposit)**. They also go out to eat every Friday night...it's become a regular thing they both enjoy and look forward to **(deposit)**. When Keisha gets ready to leave for school every morning she gives her mother a big hug and says, "I love you mom" **(deposit)**. Her mom always says, "I love you more" **(deposit)**.

A few weeks ago, Keisha was playing in her first basketball game of the season. Her mother promised that she would leave work early and make it to the game. But at half time her mother still hadn't shown up **(withdrawal)**. Keisha spent half time feeling really angry and disappointed at her Mom and barely heard what her coach was saying to the team. As the game was ending, Keisha saw her mother coming into the gym.

At the end of the game, Keisha's mom ran up to her and apologized for being late **(deposit)**. She went to give Keisha a hug **(deposit)** saying "Honey, I'm so proud of you - you were great!" **(deposit)**. But Keisha was still angry at her mom for missing most of the game. She shrugged off the hug **(withdrawal)** and said "How would you know, you weren't even here to see me play!" **(withdrawal)**. The two of them drove home in silence **(withdrawal)**.

After they got home, Keisha sat in her room and thought about the game and the way she treated her mom. She regretted having said such harsh things to her mom and after a little more thinking she realized that she was happy that her mom had made it to even a little bit of the game.

She went and knocked on her Mom's door. "Come in," her mom said. "Mom," Keisha said, "I'm sorry I yelled at you" **(deposit)**. "I know you work hard at your job and I'm glad you got to see me play even if it was just a little bit" **(deposit)**. Her mom got up and hugged her and said "I love you" **(deposit)**. Keisha hugged her back and said "But I love you more" **(deposit)**. They both laughed and jumped on the bed to watch TV together **(deposit)**.

THE END

Questions About *Keisha's Story*

- 1) What's your reaction to this story? Write a couple of sentences or words describing how this story made you feel. Also try to write a little about what it makes you think about your relationship with your own parent or teen.

- 2) Count up the number of **deposits and withdrawals** made to Keisha's emotional bank account. Write the number under Keisha's name **below**.

<u>Keisha</u>	<u>Keisha's mom</u>
Deposits: _____	Deposits: _____
Withdrawals: _____	Withdrawals: _____

- 3) Also count the number of **deposits and withdrawals** made to her mother's bank account. Write that number in the space under "Keisha's Mom" **above**.
- 4) Overall do you think the events in the story resulted in Keisha and her mom feeling **more** connected and close, **less** connected and close or **the same** as before the story? Circle your answer to this question below.

More **Same** **Less**

- 5) What kinds of things have you done recently to make a deposit into your (circle one) **parent's** or **teen's** account?

Example:

- 6) What have you done that might have made a withdrawal?

Example:

Part 3

Assessing Your Own Relationships

Time required: 20 minutes

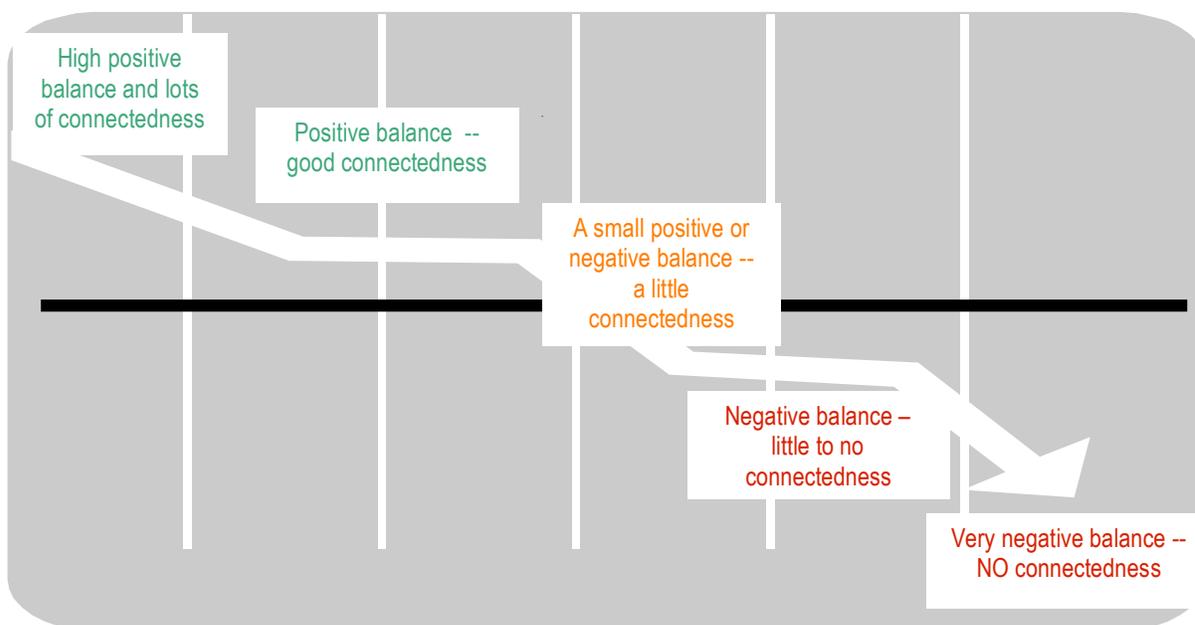
Some Things “Keisha’s Story” Teaches About Emotional Bank Accounts

Answering the questions about *Keisha’s Story*, you may have noticed that some events affected both Keisha’s and her Mom’s emotional bank accounts. Other events mostly had an impact on just one person

Everyone has things that make them feel positive, good, close or connected to another person. Also, we each have things that annoy us, hurt our feelings or make us feel less close or connected to another person. **As a result, we have a different “emotional bank account” for each significant relationship in our life.**

The imaginary “total” or “balance” in each account shows how much connectedness you feel toward that person. Because people are so different, someone might feel connected to you (they have a positive balance in their emotional bank account) even though you don’t feel the same way (you have a negative balance in the emotional bank account for your relationship with them).

What’s your estimate of the total, or “balance” in your emotional bank account with your parent or with your teenager? How connected do you feel? The chart below represents an emotional bank account. **Circle the box that best describes how close or connected you feel to that other person.**

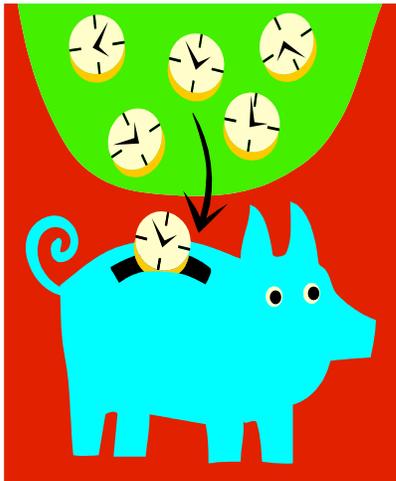


If you have a negative balance, you're probably feeling upset or worried right now. Those feelings are normal and you should let yourself feel that way – it's okay. Now we're going to look at some things you can do to get a positive balance in your emotional bank account with another person.

Part 4

Increasing Your Deposits

Time required: 20 minutes



Here are two ways you can make more deposits in the emotional bank account of your parent or teenager:

1. **Get more in touch with *their* world.**
2. **Show appreciation.**

Strategy 1: Get More in Touch with Their World

Deposits can come from learning what is going on in each other's worlds. Take the time to find out more about another person. Find out their likes, dislikes, goals, hobbies, opinions, feelings, and so on. That makes them feel good, which makes a deposit in their emotional bank account!

There is a saying that "knowledge is power." In this case, increasing your knowledge about the other person gives *you* the power to make deposits in their emotional bank account and to increase feelings of closeness and connectedness. Plus, the more you know about the other person, the more you learn about what kinds of things you can do that make them feel cared about and loved. It's no good trying to do things for someone else if those things don't actually make them feel good, is it?

Use the **Twenty Questions Game** on the next page to learn more about your parent or teen. Here are instructions for the game:

- Sit together and take turns trying to answer each question about the other person.
- Give yourselves two points for every right answer.
- Give yourselves one point for listening to the other person give you his/her answer even if you didn't know it.
- Keep it fun by skipping over any questions you don't like. You don't have to do all the questions at one time. You can spread the game out over time and even make up your own questions!



Twenty Questions Game

1. Who are your two closest friends?
2. What is your favorite musical group or type of music?
3. What is your favorite sport to play?
4. What is your favorite holiday?
5. What are two foods you like?
6. What is one food you really hate?
7. What is one accomplishment that you're really proud of?
8. What is one of your current goals?
9. What are some of your favorite ways to work out or exercise?
10. What is your favorite TV show?
11. What is your favorite movie?
12. What is one thing you're afraid of or worried about?
13. Who is your favorite relative?
14. What is one of your hopes or wishes for the future?
15. What has been your favorite vacation?
16. What do you most like to do with free time?
17. What is one thing you're really good at?
18. What is something you would like to be good at?
19. What do you most like to read?
20. What is a present you would like?

Strategy 2: Show Appreciation

Sometimes, the positive feelings between a parent and child get lost in the day-to-day hassles of school, work, after-school activities, and housekeeping. But it's possible to renew those feelings by thinking and talking about them. For example, it can be surprisingly powerful to tell your teenager or your parent what you appreciate about them. Here's another activity to try:

What I Appreciate...

From the list below, circle one characteristic that you see in your parent or teenager. If you want, write in a different characteristic on one of the blank lines.

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Adventurous | Friendly | Kind |
| Affectionate | Fun | Loyal |
| Assertive | Funny | Playful |
| Calm | Generous | Polite |
| Caring | Helpful | Responsible |
| Confident | Honest | Sensitive |
| Creative | Independent | Smart |

Describe a time when you saw the characteristic you circled in your family member:

Sit with your parent or teenager (maybe riding in the car or at the dinner table) and each of you share a characteristic you appreciate about the other person. Explain why you appreciate this characteristic so much.

Characteristic _____

Explanation _____

Part 5

Wrap-Up

Time Required: 2 minutes

This activity gave you a lot of information about maintaining a positive connection with your teen or your parent. To finish this exploration of ways to strengthen positive parent-teen connections, try completing the following sentences:

I want to improve my connection to my parent or teenager by...

Over the next week I plan to...

■ **Parent-Child Connectedness: New Interventions for Teen Pregnancy Prevention**

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