Strengths-based communications help parents develop stronger line of communications with adolescents
14 November 2019, by Alicia Rohan

Parents and teens do not have the same memory about how often parents are talking to the teen about the teen’s strengths and weaknesses. Parents often think they talk more about strengths than weaknesses, but teens think parents talk more about weaknesses than strengths, according to a University of Alabama at Birmingham study published in Applied Developmental Science.

The study compared how often parents and teens discussed strengths and weaknesses alongside how well the two communicate, how much the teen discloses to the parent, and how close the parent and teen were. Talking about strengths was more associated with better outcomes on these other measures, and not talking about strengths was associated with worse outcomes on these other measures.

According to the study, the frequency of communication about strengths, but not weaknesses, was associated with parent-adolescent general communication, adolescent disclosure and relationship quality. Reports of strengths conversations were more consistent than those conversations about weaknesses, suggesting that adolescents might remember the “sting” of conversations about weaknesses more readily than parents.

In addition to parents making intentionally hurtful or insensitive comments, well-meaning messages may be getting lost in translation as well, according to researchers.

“Providing balanced and constructive feedback for adolescents is likely a difficult line for many parents to walk,” Goodman said. “However, the frequency of communication about strengths have unique and meaningful contributions to relationship quality, general communication and disclosure.”

Goodman said future research is needed to fully understand the complex relations and their influence on developmental outcomes.