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Conflict Age 18 Summary

Why Conflict?

There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-teen relationship, and growing your teen's skills to manage conflict provides a perfect opportunity.

Tip These steps are done best when you and your teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.



- *"What are some words when you think of conflict?"*
- *"What makes you upset or mad at a friend or a relative?"*
- *"What feelings do you experience?"* (Name the multiple feelings that occur.)
- *"How does your body feel when you're upset?"*
- *"Have you hurt another person's feelings when you've argued? How did that feel? How might you have argued differently to express your needs but not harm others?"*
- *"What is the difference between impact and intention?"*
- *"What are examples of negative impacts you have had on others that maybe you didn't mean?"*
- *"How might you have engaged differently to reduce the negative impact?"*



Teach constructive conflict management to your teen using the following model:

- Step 1 - Stop. This is the most crucial step and requires them to pause. Explain to your teen that when in a conflict, it is easy for the reactive/emotional part of the brain to take over. Unfortunately, this might result in saying unkind things and doing things they regret. To get the thinking brain connected, it is necessary to pause. There are many ways to pause, including taking a breath, visualizing a stop sign, or simply imagining hitting a pause button.
- Step 2 - Check in. The second step has three parts and requires them to check in with their body, feelings, and needs. The following questions will help:

    - *"What sensations do you feel in your body?"* (heart racing, palms sweaty)
    - "*What are you feeling?"* (angry, hurt)
    - "*What do you need?*" (to be heard, to feel like my opinion matters)
- Step 3 - Communicate. Encourage your teen to communicate the feelings, needs, and requests, which might sound like: "I feel upset, and I need my opinion to matter. Could you listen to me first without interrupting?"

Teach your teen to repair harm (physical or emotional). A critical step in teaching teens about managing anger is learning how to repair harm when they've caused it.

Tip If your teen finds it difficult to give you a feeling word, then offer them options and ask which ones fit their true feelings. This helps expand their feelings vocabulary.



- Allow your teen the chance to take steps to meet their significant challenges, taking responsibility for their relationships -- even when you know you could do it faster and better.
- Consider how you can create the conditions to support their success, like offering coaching or guided open-ended questions to prompt thinking so your teen learns to become their best problem solver.
- Follow through on repairing harm. When your teen has caused harm, they need your guidance, encouragement, and support in following through to repair it.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid offering direct solutions or solving a problem for your teen.



- Use "I'd love to see…" statements and ask them to demonstrate how they can work to resolve a problem. When teens learn a new skill, they are eager to show it off! *"I'd love to see how you work out this conflict with your sister."*
- Recognize effort using "I notice..." statements like, *"I noticed how you talked to your sister about how you were feeling and then worked with her to agree. That's excellent!"*
- On days with extra challenges, say, *"Remember how you talked to your sister yesterday? You can use that same strategy with your friend today."*
- Actively reflect on how your teen is feeling when approaching challenges. You can ask *questions* like:
    - *"How are you feeling about hanging out with your friends?"*
    - *"It seems like you are holding onto angry feelings toward your friend. Have you talked to him yet? What options do you think you have?"*
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

Trap Don't move on or continue to repeat a request. Teens often need more time to deal with their feelings and approach someone with whom they are upset. Be sure to wait long enough for your teen to show you they can address their problems independently with your support. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they can solve their problems.



Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your teen's efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your teen's behavior.
    - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"You took a deep breath when you got upset — that is a great idea!"* Recognition can include nonverbal cues such as a fist bump, high five, or hug.
    - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the teen knows what to expect, like "*If you work as a team with your sister to complete your chores, you will get to hang out with your friends for an extra hour.*" (if you XX, then I'll XX) The goal should be to help your teen to progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a teen's internal motivation.
    - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent or those in a parenting role is in a crisis (like a teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to stop for a treat on the way home if the teen stops arguing and leaves the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after your teen calmly resolves a conflict with a friend, invite the friend for pizza. Or, after everyone is ready for school in the morning without conflicts, take a few minutes to listen to a favorite song together.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2023). Conflict Age 18 Summary. Retrieved from https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org

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