

Guidance and Discipline for Skill Building Age 11 Summary

Why Discipline?

As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you can be purposeful and deliberate in providing guidance and discipline. Approaching guidance and discipline for skill building as teachable moments to grow your child's/teen's skills can transform your understanding of discipline. It can enrich your relationship with your child/teen. Children/teens ages 11-14 are working to assert their independence while still being dependent. They will naturally test limits and break rules. This is a normal part of their development and necessary for their learning. Guidance and discipline aim to support the learning process and avoid harm.

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

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Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Before you can get input from your child/teen to understand (and help them understand) their feelings, you both need to be calm. Your child/teen will not learn from the situation if you or they are upset.
 - Ask yourself: "Does my child/teen have an unmet need?"
 - Ask them about how they are feeling.
 - *"I noticed your face got red. So, when you said unkind things to your friend, were you feeling frustrated?"*
 - *"I saw you weren't invited to your friend's house on Friday night. I wonder if you are feeling sad?"*
 - You can also ask them about how they think others might be feeling.
 - *"When your friend wasn't invited to the event, how do you think they felt?"*
 - *"When you said that to me, how do you think that made me feel?"*
- Get ideas. Ask your child/teen about the rules of engagement that should exist in your house. Ask your child/teen about how they would respond to some of their behaviors that challenge you.
- Use your best listening skills. Listen closely to what concerns your child/teen most without projecting your thoughts, concerns, and feelings.
- Explore the mind-body connection. Ask: *"How does your body feel now?"* See how descriptively they can list their physical signs of well-being. Now ask, *"How does your body feel when you are angry?"*

- Get curious. Considering your answers to these questions will strengthen your ability to support your child/teen.
 - *“What are some ways we have been guiding and disciplining that work and don’t work?”*
 - *“What do we want for our family? What are our hopes?”*
 - *“How do we establish rules that help us work together toward our hopes and dreams?”*
 - *“When and why do you break rules?”*

Trap Avoid letting the question turn into an accusation. Remember to stay calm and that the goal of the question is to help the child/teen uncover feelings.

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Teach New Skills

Trap It can be easy for parents or those in a parenting role to immediately address the underlying feelings with a simple “No” or other short answer. For example:

When a child/teen is angry, instead of saying, *“You shouldn’t be mad,”* shift to *“I see you are angry; let’s try taking deep breaths.”*

When a child/teen is frustrated, instead of saying, *“Here, let me do it,”* shift to *“This can be hard. Do you want some help?”*

- Teach your child/teen positive behaviors. Each time your child/teen acts inappropriately, ask yourself what positive behavior you need to teach and practice that can replace the inappropriate behavior.
- At a calm time, ask, *“What helps you feel better when you’re sad, mad, or hurt?”* Share ideas like taking deep breaths, drinking water, taking a walk, or asking for a hug.
- Remember that the goal of guidance and discipline for skill building is to have your child/teen learn something. Rather than start with what they did wrong, ask, *“What happened?”*
- Always connect first with your child/teen before offering a correction or redirection.
- Brainstorm coping strategies.
- Work on your family feelings vocabulary.
- Teach positive ways to ask for attention. Would you like your child/teen to say politely, “Excuse me,” when they need you, and you’re engaged in a conversation? If so, practice as a family.
- Reflect on your child’s/teen’s feelings so you can be prepared to help. “What needs is my child/teen not getting met? Can the issue be addressed by my child/teen alone, or do they need to communicate a need, ask for help, or set a boundary?”
- Teach assertive communication through “I-messages”: *“I feel _____ (insert feeling word) when you _____ (name the words or actions that upset you) because _____.”*

- Repair harm. A critical step in teaching your child/teen about taking responsibility for their actions is learning how to repair harm (physical or emotional) when they've caused it (and they will).
- End the day with love. When children/teens misbehave during the day, they often end the day feeling bad about themselves. Children/Teens tie your love to their behavior. Be sure to spend one time with a child/teen who has had rough patches that day to assure them they are loved no matter their choices.

Tip: When reflecting on your child's/teen's feelings, you can think about unpacking a suitcase. Frequently, layers of feelings need to be examined and understood, not just one. Anger might just be the top layer. You might ask about other layers after discovering why your child/teen was angry. Was there hurt or a sense of rejection involved? Perhaps your child/teen feels embarrassed? Fully unpacking the suitcase of feelings will help your child/teen feel better understood by you as they become more self-aware.

Tip Create a ritual of sharing words of love and care at bedtime. Ending the day reflecting on how much you appreciate one another could be the best way to send your child/teen off to sleep.

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Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use "I'd love to see..." statements. *"I'd love to see you try asking me again in a way that increases the chances I will say yes."*
- Offer limited and authentic choices. *"Would you like to do the dishes before or after finishing homework?"*
- Recognize effort by saying "I notice..." statements. *"I notice how you used our 'wait five minutes hand signal.' It worked! That's excellent!"*
- Accept feelings. Reflect and prompt a next step. *"I hear you're upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better?"*
- Practice deep breathing.
- Engage your child/teen, side by side, in taking action together to improve things in your household, school, and community.
- Follow through on repairing harm. When your child/teen has caused harm, they need your guidance, encouragement, and support to repair it. They are learning the invaluable skill of responsible decision-making.
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine. You might ask, *"What happened today that made you happy?"* or *"What were the best moments in your day?"*

Trap Refrain from judging your child's/teen's friends. You want your child/teen to trust you with their friendship worries and problems. If you harshly judge their friends, they may lose some of that trust and not confide in you.

Trap When following through on repairing harm, resist forcing your child/teen to apologize. Forcing a child to apologize teaches your child a memorized response. An apology may make you feel better, but it does not teach your child to accept responsibility for their actions or to begin to understand another's feelings.

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SUPPORT

Support Your Child's/Teen's Development and Success

- Catch your child/teen doing things right. Recognize any positive behavior, especially when the behavior is something that you have recently talked about. *"I appreciate you staying positive even when you may not like it."*
- Ask key questions to support their skills. *"You are going to see Julie today. Do you remember what you can do to assert your feelings?"*
- Promote an "I can" belief. Children/teens need to hear that you believe in their ability to learn anything with time and hard work.
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for new and different coping strategies can offer additional support and motivation for your child/teen when challenging issues arise.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

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RECOGNIZE

Recognize Efforts

No matter how old your child/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 impact your child's/teen's behavior differently.
 - **Recognize** small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"You took some time to listen to music when you were frustrated--love seeing that!"* 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 so the teen knows what to expect, like *"If you complete your chores this morning, we will go to the trampoline park this afternoon."* (if you XX, then I'll XX). The goal should be to help your teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a teen's intrinsic 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 the middle of a crisis (like a child/teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent offers to stop for ice cream on the way home if the child/teen will stop arguing and leave 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, go for a walk together after your child/teen repairs harm with a sibling. Or, in the morning, once ready for school, leave a special note of gratitude in their lunchbox.

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