

Conflict Age 13 Summary

Why Conflict?

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

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

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

STEP 1  **Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input**

- *“What are some ways you can tell you are having a conflict with someone?”*
- *“What are common issues that cause conflict for you?”*
- *“How do you feel when you are having a conflict with someone?”* (Name the multiple feelings that occur.)
- *“What do you notice is going on in your body?”* (Name the ways that your child/teen physically experiences conflict, whether it's a red, hot face or a racing heartbeat.)
- *“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?”*

STEP 2  **Teach New Skills**

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

- Step 1 - Stop. This is the most essential step and requires you to pause. Explain to your child/teen that when they are 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 when functioning in this part of their brain. To get the thinking brain connected, it is necessary to pause. There are many ways to help 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 to it and requires them to check in with their body, their feelings, and their 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 child/teen to communicate their 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 child/teen to repair harm when they've caused it

Tip If your child/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.

STEP 3 PRACTICE Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your child/teen to attempt 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 child/teen learns to become their best problem solver.
- Follow through on repairing harm. When your child/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 child/teen.

STEP 4 SUPPORT Support Your Child's/Teen's Development and Success

- Use “Show me...” or “I’d love to see...” statements and ask them to demonstrate how they can work to resolve a problem. You could say, “*I’d love to see how you use some of the skills we discussed in this argument with your sister.*”
- Use “I notice...” statements like, “*I notice you were so clear about your feelings and what you needed from your sister. Great work asking her for exactly what you needed. That's excellent!*”
- On days with extra challenges, say, “*Yesterday, when you stopped and took a breath before reacting to your sister, you could stay in control and get the outcome you wanted. It may not feel like that today, but that ability is still in you.*”
- Actively reflect on how your child/teen is feeling when approaching challenges. You can ask questions like:
 - “*How are things going with your friends? Who are you hanging out with during lunch?*” Offering a chance to talk about lunch and recess gives insight into your child’s/teen’s social challenges.
 - “*I can tell you are still upset about what happened with your friend. What do you think might be helpful?*”
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

Trap Don't move on or continue to repeat a request. Children/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 child 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 child/teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- You can reinforce your child's/teen's efforts in many ways. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three parenting behaviors impact your child's/teen's behavior differently.
 - **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 child/teen knows what to expect, like *"If you share your new game with your sister, you will get 15 minutes of extra time to play."* (if you XX, then I'll XX) The goal should be to help your child/teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. Rewards can decrease a child's/teen's internal motivation if used too often.
 - 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 child/teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role 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, after your child/teen calmly resolves a conflict with a friend, invite the friend over 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.

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