

Guidance and Discipline for Skill Building

Age 15 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 teen's skills can transform your understanding of discipline. It can enrich your relationship with your teen. Through your guidance and discipline for skill-building practices, you can intentionally teach your teens to take responsibility for their actions, internalize their sense of responsibility and self-discipline, and grow a positive parent-teen relationship. Teens and emerging adults ages 15-19 will naturally test limits and break rules. Guidance and discipline aim to support the learning process and avoid harm.

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

STEP

1



Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Before you can get input from your teen to understand (and help them understand) their feelings, you both need to be calm. Your teen will not learn from the situation if you or they are upset.
 - Ask yourself:
 - “Does my teen have an unmet need?” They might need someone to listen or give them attention, some alone time, or some help so they can be successful at something they are trying to do.
- Ask them about how they are feeling.
 - “I noticed your face got red. So, when you said unkind things to me, 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?”
- Use your best listening skills. Listen closely to your teen's concerns 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.
 - *“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?”*
- Get ideas. Ask your teen about the rules of engagement that should exist in your house. What are some agreements they are willing to make about how you all interact as a family?

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



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 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?”*

- Each time your teen acts inappropriately, ask yourself: “What need is my teen trying to get met right now?” and “What positive behavior do I need to teach and practice that can replace the misbehavior?”
- Remind yourself that the goal of guidance and discipline for skill building is to have your teen learn something. Rather than start with what they did wrong, ask, *“What happened?”*
- Always connect with your teen first before offering a correction or redirection.
- Brainstorm coping strategies.
- Teach positive ways to ask for attention; consider how your teen can learn to seek your attention in acceptable ways.
- Reflect on your teen’s feelings so you can be prepared to help. “What needs is my teen not getting met? Can the issue be addressed by my 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 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 teens misbehave during the day, they often end the day feeling bad about themselves. Teens tie your love to their behavior. Be sure to spend one-on-one time with a teen who has had rough patches that day to assure them they are loved no matter their choices.

Tip: When reflecting on your 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 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 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 teen off to sleep.

STEP 3



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use “I’d love to see...” statements. *“I’d love to see you try that in a different way where you get your needs met and no feelings are hurt in the process.”*
- Offer limited and authentic choices. Offering them a choice, even if small - *“Do you want pizza tonight or spaghetti?”* - can return a sense of control to their lives.
- Recognize effort by saying “I notice...” statements. *“I notice how you stopped yourself from interrupting me. That’s excellent!”*
- Accept feelings. Reflect back and prompt a next step. *“I hear you’re upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better?”*
- Practice deep breathing.
- Engage your teen, side by side, in taking action together to improve things in your household, school, and community.
- Follow through on repairing harm. They need your guidance, encouragement, and support in following through on steps. They are learning the invaluable skill of responsible decision-making.
- Include reflection on the day in your evening routine.

Trap Refrain from judging your teen's friends. You want your 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 teen to apologize. Forcing someone to apologize teaches them a memorized response. An apology may make you feel better, but it does not teach your teen to accept responsibility for their actions or to begin to understand another's feelings.

STEP 4



Support Your Teen's Development and Success

- Catch your 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?"*
- Learn about development. Each new age and stage will present differing challenges and along with them, stress, frustration, and anger.
- Promote an "I can" belief. 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 trying out new and different coping strategies can offer additional support and motivation for your teen when challenging issues arise.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

STEP 5



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 cleaned up your bedroom without being reminded -- I appreciate that!"* Recognition can also include nonverbal recognition such as a smile, 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 complete your chores this morning, you can hang out with friends 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 are 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 snack on the way home if the 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 teen repairs harm with a sibling, they could go to a movie together. Or, in the morning, once ready for school, leave a special note of gratitude in their backpack.

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