

## Back Talk Age 14 Summary

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### Why Back Talk?

Arguing in family life is typical and expected. “Back talk” can be defined as “argumentative replies.”<sup>1</sup> Children/teens can respond in anger, hurt, frustration, hurtful tones, or with hurtful words. But back talk also represents a power imbalance children/teens are trying to rectify. Power, after all, is a basic human need. Building your child’s/teen’s skills to respond in assertive but non-aggressive ways is essential to their success.

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

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

<b>STEP 1</b>  <b>GET INPUT</b>	<b>Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input</b>
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- *“What are some situations that make you mad or upset?”*
- *“Besides anger, what else do you feel in these situations?”* (Name the multiple feelings that occur.)
- *“What do you notice about what’s going on in your body?”* (Name how your child/teen physically experiences being upset, whether it’s a red hot face or a racing heartbeat.)
- *“What are some common ways you respond when you are upset or mad? What do you think the impact is on other people when you respond that way?”*
- *“What are some ways you can respond when you are upset or mad that don’t hurt others?”*
- Use your best listening skills! Listen closely to what concerns your child/teen most without projecting your thoughts, concerns, and feelings.

<b>STEP 2</b>  <b>TEACH</b>	<b>Teach New Skills</b>
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- Reflect on how you currently model communication when you’re upset.
- Any actions, words, or tones of voice you use with your child/teen will be repeated and mimicked back to you by them. Ask yourself, “If my child/teen repeats back to me what I

say when I am angry and in my tone of voice, will it be acceptable to me at home? In public?"

- Fighting habits hurt others and destroy trust in one another: <sup>2</sup>
  - Do not use physical force.
  - Do not talk about others negatively when they are not present.
  - Do not criticize.
  - Do not show contempt.
  - Do not become defensive or blaming.
  - Do not refuse to listen or give the silent treatment.
- Learn to use "I-messages." "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (insert feeling word) when you \_\_\_\_\_ (name the words/actions that upset you) because \_\_\_\_\_."

**Tip:** If your child/teen finds it difficult to give you a feeling word, offer them options and ask which ones fit their true feelings. This will help them expand their feelings vocabulary.



### Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your child/teen the chance to assert their needs in small and more significant ways, like ordering for themselves in a restaurant or encouraging them to discuss a grade or problem with their teacher.
- Offer coaching or guided open-ended questions to prompt thinking so they learn to become their best problem solvers.
- Share a range of feeling words regularly to become more comfortable expressing feelings.
- Practice "I-messages" on more challenging problems and various issues, including friendship conflicts. Then, when in a heated moment, gently remind them, "*What might an I-message sound like right now?*"
- Practice deep breathing to help you calm down when you have spare moments together, such as waiting in line, driving in the car, and at bedtime.



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

- Initially, your child/teen may need active support to be able to pause in the moment. Use: "*Let's pause for a moment so our brains can catch up with our emotions.*"
- Make some agreements and be clear about your expectations. "*I want to make sure we both are clear about agreeing to have this conversation. We are both committing to... and to not...*"
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like, "*I noticed how you listened to what I had to say without interrupting -- I so appreciate that!*"

- On days with extra challenges, when you can see your child/teen is frustrated or feeling irritable, proactively remind your child/teen of their strength. You can say, *“I know it doesn’t feel like this right now, but I appreciate how you rise to the occasion even when it is hard.”*
- Actively reflect on how your child/teen is feeling when approaching challenges. You can ask questions like, *“I can tell you are still hurt about what happened with your friend. What do you think you might do?”* Be sure to reflect on the outcomes of possible choices.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

**Trap:** Don't constantly repeat yourself. 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/teen to show you they can address their problems independently with your support. Your waiting could make the difference in whether they can work through their problems.



### Recognize Efforts

- Notice even small successes: *“I noticed you paused before responding. Great work staying in control!”*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Include hugs and fist bumps in your repertoire of ways to appreciate one another.

## References

1. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/back%20talk> on 11/29/18.
2. Miller, J.S. (2019) Fighting Fair Family Pledge (research synthesis). *Confident Parents, Confident Kids*. Retrieved from <https://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org/parent-resources/fighting-fair-family-pledge/>

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