

KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING WITH YOUR TEEN/TWEEN—DE-ESCALATING EMOTIONS TOOLKIT

Developmentally, it is a new phase for your teen/tween. They are looking to branch off but still want parents close by for safety and protection. Adults have the capacity to reflect on “gut” reactions, put situations in context, and consider options before responding. These brain regions are still developing in adolescence; **regulation of emotions and prediction of consequences of actions are not yet fully developed.** Best to remain calm rather than increase intensity to foster brain development for adolescent to operate within range of what maturing brain can manage.

#1 Connect and Redirect:

Listen first, then reflect back how your teen is feeling; acknowledge painful moments in their story. Be careful not to condescend or talk down to them. Just echo what you hear and use nonverbals, letting them process what happened to them. Even though your teen is still growing up, they want to be nurtured by you. If necessary, once your teen feels felt, it's time to redirect to planning and maybe discipline. Show your teen the respect of speaking clearly and directly. This is when you can provide logical explanations or resulting consequences—after your teen feels felt, not before.

#2 Engage, Don't Enrage:

Avoid “Because I said so!” Express empathy and understanding. “I don't blame you for feeling upset.” Foster choices and autonomy so that teen can practice planning and choosing, rather than triggering with absolutes or arguing with emotional experience. Be creative and respectful as you help your teen improve higher-order thinking faculties by asking them to participate with you in making decisions and coming up with solutions. Goal isn't perfection but to struggle in making difficult decisions.

#3 Let the Clouds of Emotion Roll By:

Remind teens that feelings come and go, fear and frustration are temporary traits. First connect with emotions and validate them, then help them to understand the subtle distinction between “I feel sad,” and “I am sad.” Suggest a bike ride or taking a break to stretch to help them navigate powerful and temporary emotions. Everyone feels negative emotions, don't pathologize them or sweep them under the rug for you teen. That only heightens their experience of them.

***These tools are adapted from Dan Siegel's **The Whole-Brain Child**.