Conflict Summary

Why Conflict?

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

Step 1. Get Your 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?"*
- *"What do you notice about what's going on in your body?"*
- *"What is the difference between impact and intention?"*
- *"What are examples of negative impacts you have had on others that maybe you didn't mean?"*
- *"How might you have engaged differently so as to reduce the negative impact?"*

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

Use the following model to help teach constructive conflict management to your teen:

- Step 1 - Stop. This is the most important step and requires us to pause. Explain to your teen that when we are in a conflict, it is easy for our reactive/emotional brain to take over. Unfortunately, we say unkind things and do things we regret when functioning like this. In order to get our thinking brain connected, we need to pause. There are many ways to help taking a pause, for example, 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 us to check in with our body, our feelings, and our needs. The following questions will help:
    - *"What sensations do I feel in my body?"* (heart racing, palms sweaty)
    - "*What am I feeling?"* (angry, hurt)
    - "*What do I need?*" (to be heard, to feel like my opinion matters)
- Step 3 - Communicate. Encourage your teen to then communicate the feeling, need, and request which might sound like: "*I feel upset, and I need my opinion to matter. Could you listen to me first without interrupting?"*

Tip If your teen struggles giving you a feeling word, then offer them options and ask which ones fit their true emotions. This helps expand their emotional vocabulary.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Allow your teen the chance to take steps to meet their big challenges, taking responsibility for their own relationships - even when you know you could do it faster and better.
- Be sure and consider how you can create the conditions to support their success like offering coaching or guided open-ended questions to prompt thinking, so that your teen learns to become their own best problem solver.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching but avoid offering direct solutions, going directly to the other in the conflict, or solving a problem for your teen.

Tip The best way to turnaround a misbehavior is by recognizing when and how your teen makes good choices and acts positively in similar circumstances. Teens need to learn what to do as well as what not to do.

Step 4. **Support** Your 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 just talked about in this argument with your sister."*
- On days with extra challenges, say: *"Yesterday, when you stopped and took a breath before reacting to your sister, you were able to stay in control and get the outcome you wanted. It may not feel like that today, but that ability is still in you."*
- Stay engaged. Ask yourself if you need to reteach or make changes.
- Engage in further practice. Role play or rehearse when needed.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

Trap Don't move on or nag. 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 teen to show you they can address their problems on their own with your support. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to work through their problems.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *"I noticed you paused and got really clear about what you needed. Yes! Excellent."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps in your repertoire of ways to appreciate one another.

Tip Be specific. "Good job" seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - "*You talked with your brother until you both could agree - love seeing that!"* - can promote more of the same.

Trap If you focus only on outcomes - *"You didn't argue at all*" - you miss the chance to influence the process. Better to say - *"You were arguing in the car, you both calmed down, and then, you talked it through."*

Trap Avoid gifts or other physical rewards for performance. These actually have a de-motivating effect on teens. When you remove the money, for example, have they internalized the skills and also the sense of responsibility for performing them? There's less of a chance if you've offered a "bribe." Focus on your attention as the best reward. Your attention and recognition add to their feelings of competence. This is an essential strategy in discipline for skill building.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your teen's success today and in their future!

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