



## 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.

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

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

### Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *“What are some words that come up when you think of conflict?”*
- *“What makes you really upset or mad at a friend or a relative?”*
- *“What feelings do you experience?”* (Name the multiple feelings that occur.)
- *“How does your body feel when you're upset?”*
- *“Have you hurt another person's feelings when you've argued? How did that feel? How might you have argued differently to express your needs but not harm the other person?”*
- *“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

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

- **Step 1 - Stop.** This is the most important step and requires them to pause. Explain to your teen that when 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. In order to get the thinking brain connected, it is important to pause. There are many ways to take a 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 teen to 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?”

Teach your teen to repair harm (physical or emotional). A critical step in teaching teens about managing anger is learning how to repair harm when they’ve caused it.

**Tip** If your teen struggles giving you a feeling word, then offer them options and ask which one or couple of them fit their true feelings. This helps expand their feeling vocabulary.

### Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills 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 to 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.
- Follow through on repairing harm. When your 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, going directly to the other in the conflict, or solving a problem for your teen.

### Step 4. **Support** Your Teen’s Development and Success

- Use “I’d love to see...” statements and ask them to demonstrate how they can work to resolve a problem. When a teen learns a new skill, they are eager to show it off! *“I’d love to see how you work out this conflict with your sister.”*
- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements like, *“I noticed how you talked to your sister about how you were feeling and then worked with her on a way to come to an agreement. That’s excellent!”*
- On days with extra challenges, say, *“Remember how you talked to your sister yesterday? You can use that same strategy with your friend today.”*
- Actively reflect on how your teen is feeling when approaching challenges. You can ask *questions* like:
  - *“How are you feeling about hanging out with your friends?”*
  - *“Seems like you are holding onto angry feelings toward your friend. Have you talked to him yet? What options do you think you have?”*
- 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 talked to your sister after she hurt you and tried to work it out. 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.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Conflict Summary. Ages 15-19*. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.