



Guidance and Discipline for Skill Building Summary

Why Discipline?

As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you can choose to be purposeful and deliberate in the ways you provide guidance and discipline. Approaching guidance and discipline for skill building as teachable moments to grow your child's/teen's skills can be transformational in your understanding of discipline and can enrich your relationship with your child/teen. Children/teens ages 11-14 are working to assert their independence while still being dependent. They will naturally test limits and break rules. This is a normal part of their development and necessary for their learning.

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

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

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

- Before you can get input from your child/teen to understand (and help them understand) what they are feeling, you both need to be calm. Your child/teen will not learn from the situation if you or they are upset.
 - Ask yourself: "Does my child/teen have an unmet need?"
 - Ask them about how they are feeling.
 - *"I noticed your face got really red. So, when you said unkind things to your friend, 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 were feeling?"*
 - *"When you said that to me, how do you think that made me feel?"*
- Get ideas. Ask your child/teen about the rules of engagement that should exist in your house. Ask your child/teen about how they would respond to some of their behaviors that challenge you.
- Use your best listening skills! Listen closely to what is most concerning to your child/teen without projecting your own 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 wellbeing. Now ask, *"How does your body feel when you are angry?"*

- Get curious. Considering your own answers to these questions will strengthen your ability to support your child/teen.
 - *“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?”*

Trap Avoid letting the questions you ask turn into accusations. Remember to stay calm and that the goal of the question is to help your child/teen uncover feelings.

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

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 child/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?”*

- Teach your child/teen positive behaviors. Each time your child/teen acts inappropriately, ask yourself what positive behavior you need to teach and practice that can replace the inappropriate behavior.
- At a calm time, ask *“What helps you feel better when you’re sad, mad, or hurt?”* Share ideas like taking deep breaths, getting a drink of water, taking a walk, or asking for a hug.
- Remind yourself that the goal of guidance and discipline for skill building is to have your child/teen learn something. Rather than starting with what they did wrong, start with asking, *“What happened?”*
- Always connect first with your child/teen before offering a correction or redirection.
- Brainstorm coping strategies.
- Work on your family feelings vocabulary.
- Teach positive ways to ask for attention. Would you like your child/teen to say a polite “Excuse me” when they need you and you’re engaged in a conversation? If so, practice as a family.
- Reflect on your child’s/teen’s feelings, so you can be prepared to help. “What needs is my child/teen not getting met? Can the issue be addressed by my child/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 child/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 children/teens misbehave during the day, they often end the day feeling bad about themselves. Children/Teens tie your love to their behavior. Be sure that you spend one on one time with a child/teen who has had rough patches that day to assure them they are loved no matter what choices they make.

Tip When you are reflecting on your child's/teen's feelings, you can think about unpacking a suitcase. Frequently, there are layers of feelings that need to be examined and understood not just one. Anger might just be the top layer. After you've discovered why your child/teen was angry, you might ask about other layers. Was there hurt or a sense of rejection involved? Perhaps your child/teen feels embarrassed? Fully unpacking the suitcase of feelings will help your child/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. Consider that ending the day reflecting on how much you appreciate one another could just be the best way to send your child/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 asking me again in a way that increases the chances I will say yes."*
- Offer limited and authentic choices. *"Would you like to do the dishes before or after finishing homework?"*
- Recognize effort by saying "I notice..." statements. *"I notice how you used our 'wait five minutes hand signal.' It worked! 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 child/teen, side by side, in taking action together to make things better in your household, at your school, and in your community.
- Follow through on repairing harm. When your child/teen has caused harm, they need your guidance, encouragement, and support in following to repair it. They are learning the invaluable skill of responsible decision making.
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine. You might ask, *"What happened today that made you happy?"* or *"What were the best moments in your day?"*

Trap Refrain from judging your child's/teen's friends. You want your child/teen to trust you with their friendship worries and problems. If you harshly judge their friends, they may lose some of that trust and may not confide in you.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's/Teen's Development and Success

- Catch your child/teen doing things right. Recognize any positive behavior, especially when the behavior is something that you have recently talked about. *"I so appreciate you staying positive even when you may not feel 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?"*
- Promote an "I can" belief. Children/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 help offer additional support and motivation for your child/teen when tough issues arise.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

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

- Notice when all is moving along smoothly. *“I noticed when you got frustrated with your homework, you moved away and took some deep breaths. Yes! Excellent.”*
- Recognize small steps along the way. Find small ways your child/teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, celebrate with game night or watching a show or movie together. Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps as ways to appreciate one another.

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