



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 teen's skills can be transformational in your understanding of discipline and can enrich your relationship with your teen. Through your guidance and discipline for skill building practices, you can intentionally teach your teens to take responsibility for their actions, internalize their own sense of responsibility and self-discipline, and grow a positive parent-teen relationship. Teens and emerging young adults ages 15-19 will naturally test limits and break rules.

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

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

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

- Ask yourself:
 - “Does my teen have an unmet need?” They might need someone to listen or give them attention, some alone time, or some help so they can be successful at something they are trying to do.
- Ask them about how they are feeling.
 - *“I noticed your face got really red. So, when you said unkind things to me, 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?”*
- Use your best listening skills! Listen closely to what is most concerning to your 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.
 - *“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?”*
- Get ideas. Ask your teen about the rules of engagement that should exist in your house. What are some agreements they are willing to make about how you all interact as a family?

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 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 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 teen is frustrated, instead of saying, *“Here, let me do it,”* shift to *“This can be hard. Do you want some help?”*

- Each time your teen acts inappropriately, ask yourself these two questions: “What need is my teen trying to get met right now?” and “What positive behavior do I need to teach and practice that can replace the misbehavior?”
- Remind yourself that the goal of guidance and discipline for skill building is to have your teen learn something. Rather than starting with what they did wrong, start by asking, *“What happened?”*
- Always connect with your teen first before offering a correction or redirection.
- Brainstorm coping strategies.
- Teach positive ways to ask for attention; consider how your teen can learn to seek your attention in acceptable ways.
- Reflect on your teen’s feelings, so you can be prepared to help. “What needs is my teen not getting met? Can the issue be addressed by my 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 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 teens misbehave during the day, they often end the day feeling bad about themselves. Teens tie your love to their behavior. Be sure that you spend one-on-one time with a 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 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 teen was angry, you might ask about other layers. Was there hurt or a sense of rejection involved? Perhaps your teen feels embarrassed? Fully unpacking the suitcase of feelings will help your 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 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 that in a different way where you get your needs met and no feelings are hurt in the process."*
- Offer limited and authentic choices. Offering them a choice even if small - *"Do you want pizza tonight or spaghetti?"* - can return a sense of control to their lives.
- Recognize effort by saying "I notice..." statements. *"I notice how you stopped yourself from interrupting me. 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 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. They need your guidance, encouragement, and support in following through on steps. They are learning the invaluable skill of responsible decision making.
- Include reflection on the day in your evening routine.

Trap Refrain from judging your teen's friends. You want your 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 Teen’s Development and Success

- Catch your 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?”*
- Learn about development. Each new age and stage will present differing challenges and along with them, stress, frustration, and anger.
- Promote an “I can” belief. 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 teen when tough issues arise.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

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

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. *“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 teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps as ways to appreciate one another.

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