

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

May/June 2024

N F A N P A

KEY STRATEGIES TO TEACH CHILDREN EMPATHY (SORTED BY AGE)

Written by: Ashley Cullins

You may have heard the saying, “Before you criticize or judge someone, walk a mile in their shoes.” This quote is all about empathy. Empathy is the ability to be aware of the feelings of others and imagine what it might be like to be in their position (or in their shoes).

Empathy is a key ingredient in positive friendships and relationships. It reduces conflict and misunderstandings and leads to helping behavior, kindness, and even greater success in life in general.

And like any skill, empathy can be taught and developed in children. Because cognitive abilities and life experiences develop over time, the most effective strategies to use depend on the child’s age.

Let’s look at some key strategies for teaching empathy to children, as well as some age-by-age ideas and activities.

Before you continue, we thought you might like to download our FREE 21-Day Family Gratitude Challenge. Make this challenge a part of your night routine or family dinner time for the next 21 days (that’s how long it takes to build a habit).



4 General Strategies to Teach Empathy at Any Age

Model empathy.

Any time you want to teach a skill to a child, it’s important to model it yourself. This way, the child understands what empathy looks like, sounds like, and feels like. Plus, it’s easier

to teach a skill that you’ve already mastered yourself.

Remember to model empathy even when you’re upset with or giving consequences to your child. This reinforces the idea that empathy can and should be used even when you’re feeling disappointed, hurt, or angry. The more children receive empathy, the more likely they are to offer it to others.

Discuss emotions.

Talk openly about emotions rather than dismissing or burying them. Let’s say your child is scared of the dark. Instead of saying, “There’s nothing to be afraid of,” explore the child’s feelings: “Are you scared of the dark? What

scares you about the dark?”

If your child doesn’t like another child, don’t immediately say, “That’s wrong,” but ask why the child feels that way. This can lead to a discussion about the other child’s actions and why the child might be acting that way (e.g., They just moved

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Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to Corinne@nfapa.org, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/May-June2024> We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. List 4 Strategies to Teach Empathy at any Age.
2. True or False. As Your Children Grow Older, it's Important That They Also Understand empathy Means Taking on the Problems and Needs of Everyone Around Them.
3. Fill in the Blanks. Give Your Child Opportunities to Play With children of _____, _____, _____, _____, and so on.
4. True or False. Empathy can be Taught and Developed Over Time, and it Will Give Your Child a Foundation on Which to Build Sound Judgment, Success, and Positive and Healthy Relationships Throughout Their Life.
5. List Seven Stages of a Meltdown.
6. Fill in the Blank. Underneath Every Challenging Behavior we see a Root Cause Stemming From a _____ and an _____.
7. List 8 Other Triggers That Precipitate Misbehavior.
8. List 8 Effective Tools for Helping Your Child Regulate During the Peak of Escalation.
9. List Five Top Reasons Why Teens Lie.
10. List Five Ways to Encourage Honesty in Your Teen.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

(Continued from page 1)

to a new school and are feeling angry because they miss their old school and their friends).

Never punish a child for feeling sad or angry. Make it clear that all emotions are welcome, and learn to manage them in a healthy way through discussion and reflection.

Help out at home, in the community, or globally.

Helping others develop kindness and caring. It can also give children the opportunity to interact with people of diverse backgrounds, ages, and circumstances, making it easier to show empathy for all people.

Read through our list of activities that make a difference at home, in the community, and globally, then pick an activity or two and get started.

Praise empathetic behavior.

When your child shows empathy for others, praise the behavior. Focusing on and encouraging empathetic behavior encourages more of it in the future.

Make the praise specific: “You brought your sister a Band-Aid for her scraped knee so she could feel better. That was so kind and helpful!”

Age-Specific Strategies

Below are some age-specific strategies for developing empathy in children. The age ranges below are a general guide; start with a few activities or ideas that you think will resonate with your child. Some activities introduced to younger children may be carried on into the later years.

3-5 Years

Describe and label.

Help children recognize their emotions and the emotions of others by describing and labeling (e.g., “You seem angry,” or, “Are you feeling sad?”).

You can also promote body awareness, as young children may find it easier to identify emotions based on how it feels in their body.

For instance, you might say, “You’re clenching your fists. You stomped your feet. You seem angry.” The more children become aware of their own emotions, the more they’ll recognize and consider the emotions of others.

Read Stories.

As you read stories with your child, ask how the characters in the storybooks might be feeling.

Here’s one example from our list of 29 Books and Activities That Teach Kindness to Children:

“Listening with My Heart” by Gabi Garcia tells the story of Esperanza, who learns to be kind both to others and to herself

when things don’t go as planned. You can ask your child questions like:

- How does Esperanza feel at the beginning of the story? How do Esperanza’s feelings change during the story?
- How does Bao feel at the beginning of the story? How do Bao’s feelings change?
- How was Esperanza feeling when she ran off the stage?
- If you could talk to Esperanza after she ran off the stage, what would you say to her?
- How do you think it would feel if it happened to you? What would you like someone to say to you after that experience?
- What does Esperanza do to be a good friend to herself?
- What can you do to be a good friend to yourself?

You can also read about and discuss how it feels when others are mean with the book “Chrysanthemum” by Kevin Henkes, in which Chrysanthemum loves her unique name—until others start to tease her about it.

“The Day the Crayons Quit” by Drew Daywalt is another great book for discussing emotions with young children. In this colorful story, Duncan just wants to color. Unfortunately, his crayons are on strike. Beige is always overlooked for Brown, Black only gets to make outlines, Orange and Yellow are in a standoff over which is the true color of the sun, and so on.

As Duncan tries to find a way to make all of his crayons happy, you can talk to children about how the crayons (and Duncan) are feeling. This is also a good way to teach that everyone has different needs, hopes, and dreams, and sometimes it’s hard to find ways for everyone to agree.

You can take a similar approach with just about any story that your child loves!

Make a “We Care Center”.

Dr. Becky Bailey, the founder of the SEL program Conscious Discipline, recommends making a We Care Center to teach children empathy.

The We Care Center can be as simple as a box containing Kleenex, Band-Aids, and a small stuffed animal. This provides a symbolic way for children to offer empathy to others in distress.

For instance, a young child may notice that Mom seems sad—or even that Mom is sneezing—and offer tissues.

This teaches children to be aware of others and to develop an understanding that our responses and actions can have a positive impact.

We can also model this relationship with statements like, “Our neighbors are sick. Let’s take them some soup to help them feel better!” or, “Your brother scraped his elbow. Let’s help by bringing him a Band-Aid!”

Coach social skills in the moment.

If your child snatches her brother’s toy, ask questions like, “How do you think your brother feels? How do you feel when

your brother takes your toys? Look at his face. He seems sad. What could we do instead of snatching your brother's toy?"

At this point, you could teach a more appropriate response to want a toy, such as asking for a turn, making a trade, or playing with another toy while waiting. It's much easier for children to learn social skills when they are taught in context.

5-7 Years

Play emotion charades.

Teaching emotions through play is an important way to develop empathy in children. Games and activities can help children learn the language to express and understand complex feelings.

To play emotion charades, take turns acting out emotions and guessing what feeling is being portrayed. After a player has guessed correctly, you can also discuss the emotion with questions like:

- When do you feel sad?
- What helps you feel better when you're sad?
- How can we help someone else when they're feeling sad?

Lisette at the *Where Imagination Grows* blog suggests a helpful variation on this game. She uses the characters from the movie *Inside Out* to represent different emotions.

She cuts out images of the characters and glues each character onto an index card. The performer then draws an index card from a bucket and acts out that emotion. The other children hold up the corresponding *Inside Out* character figurine to guess the emotion.

Use pictures.

Visuals are another great way to help children learn. If your child seems to have trouble recognizing and/or labeling emotions, cut out pictures from magazines or print pictures from the Internet that show sad, angry, or happy faces. You can also work up to more complex emotions like scared, embarrassed, disappointed, frustrated, etc.

As you discuss how the people in the pictures are feeling, you can also ask children about times they felt the same way. Provide examples from your own life too, showing that even adults grapple with big emotions and that it's perfectly normal.

Embrace diversity.

A major component of empathy is respecting others from different backgrounds.

Give your child opportunities to play with children of different races, backgrounds, ability levels, sexes, and so on. You can also read books or watch shows featuring children who are different from your child. Help children understand and focus on what they have in common with others.

Observe others.

Deepen your child's understanding of nonverbal cues by

playing a game where you observe other people in a busy public place, like a park.

Note the body language of others and guess how they might be feeling. "That child's head is down, and his shoulders are hunched like this. I think he might be feeling sad. I wonder why he feels that way?"



Teach healthy limits and boundaries.

As your children grow older, it's important that they also understand empathy doesn't mean taking on the problems and needs of everyone around them. It doesn't mean always saying "yes" or dropping everything to help others.

Teach your children to understand and respect their own needs by following these 3 steps.

1. Create a plan for how your child can respond in certain scenarios. If, for example, another child gives an unwanted hug, your child can say, "I don't like that. Please don't touch me." If a child calls your child a name, your child can say, "My name is _____. Call me that instead."

2. Create a list of scenarios in which it's necessary to ask an adult for help, like a child refusing to take no for an answer or any situation that feels dangerous or uncomfortable. In addition, explain that being helpful to others should not involve breaking any rules or doing anything that your child isn't comfortable with.

3. Respect your child's boundaries. If your child doesn't like to be tickled or doesn't want to be picked up and spun around, don't push the issue. Say, "I understand. I won't do it again." This models the way your child should expect others to behave when he or she says "no."

Don't forget to download our FREE 21-Day Family Gratitude Challenge and make this challenge a part of your family's routine!

7-9 Years

Engage in high-level discussions about book characters.

Read more advanced books and engage in high-level discussions about what the characters think, believe, want, and feel. How do we know?

For example, read “The Invisible Boy” by Trudy Ludwig, in which a boy named Brian struggles with feeling like he is invisible. He’s never invited to parties or included in games. When a new student named Justin arrives, Brian is the first to make him feel welcome. When the boys team up on a class project, Brian finds a way to shine. The book teaches children that small acts of kindness can help kids feel included and allow them to flourish.

After reading, ask questions like:

- Why did Brian feel invisible?
- How do you think being “invisible” makes Brian feel?
- How did Brian help Justin feel welcome?
- How did Justin help Brian feel more “visible?”
- Have you ever felt left out or invisible? What would have helped you feel more included or visible?

In one experimental study, 110 school kids (aged seven years) were enrolled in a reading program. Some students were randomly assigned to engage in conversations about the emotional content of the stories they read. Others were asked only to produce drawings about the stories.

After two months, the kids in the conversation group showed greater advances in emotion comprehension, the theory of mind, and empathy, and the positive outcomes “remained stable for six months.”

You can select books to read with your children that are directly related to empathy. Alternatively, notice what your children are reading and engage them in conversations about the characters, their emotions, and what your child might think, feel, or do in similar situations.

Loving-kindness and compassion meditation.

Studies show that as little as two weeks of training in compassion and kindness meditations can lead to changes in brain chemistry that are linked to an increase in positive social behaviors, including empathy. These meditations also lead to increased positive emotions and social connectedness, in addition to improved health.

Loving-kindness meditation involves thinking of loved ones and sending them positive thoughts. Later, your child can expand her positive thoughts to more neutral people in her life as well.

The four traditional phrases for this meditation are, “May you feel safe. May you feel happy. May you feel healthy. May you live with ease.” The exact wording you and your child use aren’t important; it’s about generating feelings of kindness and warmth.

With compassion training, children visualize experiences in

which they felt sad or upset, then relate to these experiences with warmth and care. They then repeat the exercise with other people, starting with close loved ones, followed by a difficult person, and finally extending compassion to humanity in general.

Engage in cooperative board games or cooperative construction.

Research shows that successful experiences with cooperation encourage us to cooperate more in the future. Collaborating with others can encourage children to build positive relationships and to be open to developing more positive relationships in the future.

These experiences also involve discussions and debate, teaching children to consider other perspectives.

Ideas for cooperative board games or cooperative construction include:

- Play with Legos, working together to build something specific
- Race to the Treasure! (a board game in which children collaborate to build a path and beat an ogre to the treasure)
- Outfoxed! (a cooperative whodunit game)
- Stone Soup (an award-winning cooperative matching game)
- The Secret Door (a mystery board game in which children ages 5+ work together to solve the mystery behind the secret door)

9-11 Years

Sign up for acting classes.

If your child is interested, get him involved in theater or acting classes. Stepping into the role of another person is a great way to build empathy, just as playing pretend helps young children develop understanding and compassion for others.

Create empathy maps.

Empathy maps include four sections: Feel, Think, Say, and Do. Choose an emotion, then brainstorm what you might say, think, and do when you feel that way.

For example: “When I feel worried, I might think I’m making a lot of mistakes or that something bad is going to happen. I say, ‘I’m sorry’ too much or, ‘I can’t do this.’ Sometimes when I’m worried, I do nothing at all. Something helpful that I can do is to take deep breaths and remind myself that everything will be okay.”

If it comes up, you can highlight the fact that what we say or do is sometimes the opposite of what we’re really feeling. You can discuss why that is and how we can relate that to showing empathy and understanding for others.

Ages 12+

Discuss current events.

Learn about current events and develop empathy by reading newspapers, news magazines, or watching the news together. Alternatively, you can do this activity when your child mentions a current event to you.

Ask questions like:

- How might the people involved in this situation be feeling?
- How would you feel in a similar situation?
- Is there anything we can do to help?

Encourage your child to choose volunteer work.

Encourage your child to choose volunteer work that he or she is passionate about. As children get older, they can take a more direct role in helping the community or society in general. They may even want to start their own projects or charitable organizations to solve a problem they feel strongly about.

It's important for kids to explore the world beyond themselves. Our Big Life Journal - Teen Edition includes a section where older kids can write down and map out ways they can make a difference in the world. They can take these passions and turn them into opportunities to serve their communities.

Walk the line.

This activity is perfect for classrooms, summer camps, or other places with a large group of older children/teens. "Walk the Line" was demonstrated in the movie Freedom Writers.

Put a line of tape in the middle of the group, with students facing each side's line. Read a series of statements. If the statement is true for the student, they go stand on the line.

This could include statements like "I've lost a family member," "I've been bullied at school," and so on. Students can also help create the prompts.

The activity shows the struggles they have in common and helps them understand what their peers experience and feel. At the end of the activity, students return to their seats to reflect through writing or discussion.

One option is to have students write a letter (that they can deliver or keep to themselves) to a student who walked to the line on one of the same prompts they moved on, sharing more about this experience or offering words of encouragement.

Empathy can be taught and developed over time, and it will give your child a foundation on which to build sound judgment, success, and positive and healthy relationships throughout their life. Choose one or two activities from this list and get started!

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8 WAYS TO DE-ESCALATE MELTDOWNS WITH YOUR CHILD

Teens and toddlers alike can demonstrate aggressive or uncooperative behaviors as influenced by big emotions and neurological overwhelm (aka the dreaded meltdown). De-escalation tools support parents in defusing the chaos by helping children calm and regulate their nervous systems.

Meltdown Escalation Cycle

Often a child's outburst or tantrum can seem unpredictable. However, experts say there is a predictable pattern to this escalation, referred to as the acting-out cycle. To help parents choose effective interventions, it is useful to understand these seven stages:

Calm - In this phase, your child is responsive and cooperative.

Trigger - A stimulus sets off a pattern of behavior.

Agitation - Your child displays signs of anxiety or may withdraw from the situation.

Acceleration - The escalation of uncooperative, aggressive, or provocative behaviors.

Peak - This is the climax of the incident. Your child's behavior will feel out of control.

De-escalation - The reduction in the frequency or intensity of unpleasant behaviors.

Recovery - Your child transitions back to a calm, responsive state.

Reasons For Meltdowns & Escalation

Underneath every challenging behavior we see is a root cause stemming from a thought process and an emotion.

When we as parents learn to remain curious about the unmet need, we can better come to understand misbehavior as a form of communication, heading off meltdowns and deflecting escalation just by noticing and meeting these unmet needs.

The Need For Attention

When a child misbehaves, an adult often notices and responds quickly, giving children a sense of control by commanding the attention of everyone around them. An antidote for attention may be a Genuine Encounter Moment (GEM).

A GEM is five to fifteen minutes of focused attention on your child - an opportunity for heart-to-heart, not head-to-head, communication. Not every moment will be a GEM, but if you offer several a day, your relationship will improve, and undesirable behaviors will decline.

For younger children, a GEM may come in the form of child-led play. Get eye level or below, join them in their world, and allow them to be the leader of the moment.

Because teens may come less often for a GEM than a toddler



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- **June 29, 2024**

The Impact of Brain Injury on System-Involved Youth

By Carrin Meadows, Brain Injury Alliance of NE

A lifetime history of brain injury can result in impairments in physical, emotional, and/or cognitive functioning. This session will discuss the impact of brain injury on system-involved youth.

The presenter will provide an overview of brain injury signs and symptoms, the prevalence of brain injury in high-risk populations, and simple tools and strategies to help minimize the effects of brain injury once it is identified through a screening process.

- **July 20, 2024**

Child Abuse Hotline and Reporting Abuse & Neglect

By Susan Ward, Hotline Deputy Administrator

This training will be a great opportunity to learn the basics of reporting concerns for abuse and neglect. There will be a discussion on reporting abuse and neglect to the Hotline and a chance to ask questions and become familiar with what is reportable and what happens after a report is filed.

- **August 10, 2024**

Strategies for Advocating for Children's Needs and Recognition and Intervention for Bullying

By Cami Bergman, PTI Nebraska School-Age Information Specialist

During this training, you will learn about strategies for effective communication and collaboration with schools and biological parents of children, how to navigate conflict, and the responsibilities of a surrogate parent. You will also learn how to recognize bullying behavior as well as interventions and response strategies.

Register by clicking on the link below or use the QR code.

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- when they do come for these types of little moments, pause what you are doing, make eye contact, and actively listen.

The Need For Power

Another possible source of outbursts is the need for power. When children feel out of control, whether from stressors in their lives or from the lack of opportunity to exercise their independence, they tend to cling to control wherever they can. The goal is to empower our children rather than overpower them. Some ways to do this are by offering choices, encouraging them to complete age-appropriate tasks, inviting their help or opinion, focusing on the behavior you desire (as opposed to that you don't), and replacing commanding and demanding with asking questions and providing information.

Additional Needs

Other triggers that precipitate misbehavior include:

Transition times

Feeling hungry or tired

Being off routine

Unexpected changes in the day

Feeling under- or over-stimulated

Needing to wait

Unfamiliar social situations

Challenging schoolwork

Parents and other caregivers can intervene before these situations arise to disrupt the acting-out cycle. Here are some things you can do to meet these needs and regulate your child before they begin to escalate:

Announce transitions - "Let's set a timer for five minutes. When it dings, we are cleaning up the toys."

Ensure age-appropriate meals at age-appropriate times.

Have a consistent nighttime ritual that honors their natural sleep rhythm.

Keep routines consistent and predictable, and discuss changes ahead of time.

Keep from over-scheduling.

Notice your child's cues for either movement or rest throughout the day.

Teach the skills of impulse control and "waiting" through playful games.

Break schoolwork into bite-sized pieces that allow for focus and celebrate small successes.

Emotional Regulation And The Brain

All humans operate from three areas of the brain: the forebrain, midbrain, and hindbrain. Knowing these brain states helps us recognize our child's needs and offers a set of tools for regulation.

Forebrain

The forebrain, also known as the prefrontal cortex, is the last region to develop, beginning around age three and continuing

into the mid-to-late twenties. This is where learning, both academic and social-emotional, occurs. The prefrontal cortex allows for skills of empathy, compassion, self, social awareness, impulse control, problem-solving, and more.

The most effective tools for this brain are to meet your child where they are and teach tools in a supportive way by asking, "What tools am I trying to teach, and how can I best teach them free of punishment, blame, or shame?"

Midbrain

The midbrain is our emotional hub, known as the limbic system. This area is responsible for attachment, memory retention, and emotions.

When this brain is dysregulated, children may seem whiny, clingy, demanding, uncooperative, and nervous. An effective mantra for this stage is: name it to tame it, feel it to heal it.

When the amygdala, a component of the limbic system, is activated, it sends an impulse to the lower brainstem, which can lead to those reactive behaviors discussed above. But, just in naming your emotion ("I am mad"), an impulse is also sent to the higher-thinking brain, lighting up the gray matter responsible for executive function. The higher brain can therefore override the lower brain and, in return, help the child tame - aka regulate - their emotions and behaviors.

Hindbrain

The hindbrain, also known as the brainstem, is responsible for survival and jumps into action when it detects a threat.

A threat can be as real as actual trauma or perceived such as having an unmet need. Because it is fully developed at birth, tots and teens can easily resort to brainstem behaviors of fight, flight, freeze, or fawn when dysregulated.

About 90% of communication with our kids is through our body language, so something as simple as getting down low, at the child's eye level or below, and saying, "You are safe". Often, body language alone is effective in communicating a sense of safety to a child. Having diffused their internal protective responses, children can then move into higher brain functioning, feeling safe and connected.

Tools to De-escalate Meltdowns

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, things do escalate. Meltdowns and tantrums are your child's pressure valve to help them let off steam and de-stress. When met with connection, you can help your child emotionally transition, manage behaviors, and teach higher-level skills while keeping your relationship intact.

Here are some effective tools for helping your child regulate during the peak of escalation:

1. Intervene early

Notice the verbal and nonverbal warning signs that may

communicate your child is escalating. These include being tearful, pacing, balled fists, shaking, clenched jaw, fidgeting, grunting, or talking in a faster and/or higher-pitched tone.

2. Center yourself

Mirror neurons communicate to our brain to echo the nervous system of others. If we come into a situation hot and bothered, equipped with our judgments and biases, our children will replicate and escalate on our energy. At the same time, if we pause to breathe and center, our children are more apt to anchor into our calmness.

It is hard to argue with someone who is not responding aggressively back to you. In general, use a respectful and calm tone (as opposed to yelling) and indicate safety with your body language by getting low, making eye contact, having open hands, a neutral/non-reactive facial expression, and a square body.

3. Avoid poking the bear

When children are in their primitive brainstem, they are unable to think logically. Avoid reasoning with them, asking questions, or making demands as it will only further dysregulate and escalate their emotions and behaviors. The time to speak logically and teach the lessons is when they are already regulated and able to access their thinking brain.

Decrease stimulation by turning lights low and minimizing the number of people in the room. The smaller the “audience” the better. If your child will not leave the room, ask other family members to go to a different location to help your child calm their nervous system.

4. Respect personal space

Understanding your child’s desire for personal space and/or closeness is helpful when things begin to escalate. Some children desire proximity while other children will feel like a cornered bear as you approach, which will further agitate their aggression and surge the situation. If needed, maintain some space to keep both you and your child safe.

5. Validate feelings

As your child moves out of their reflexive brainstem and into their emotional limbic system, validate their experience and reflect on what you hear.

Reflect: Repeat what you have heard and clarify. TRY THIS: So, you are saying you are upset because you wanted grandma to pick you up from school today. Is this right?

Validate: When validating your child’s emotions, use words such as because or and instead of a dismissive but.

TRY THIS: It makes sense that you’re upset right now because you really wanted to go to grandma’s house, and because it’s hard to not get what you want sometimes.

NOT THIS: I see you are mad but we don’t act this way.

Support: Let them know they will get through this and you

are there for them. TRY THIS: I know this is hard and I will stay with you while it is hard.

6. Invite awareness

Sometimes, we can help a child shift their focus from what has happened into the present moment, and they begin to integrate their brain. Here are a few ways to do this:

Ask them what they hear, see, feel, smell, or taste. One fun application is to use their fingers to track what they can observe with their senses (5 things you can hear, 4 things you can see, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste).

Use breathwork. When we are stressed, angry, or tense, our breathing patterns become shallow and rapid. Start by matching your child’s breathing then gradually slow it down. Your child will likely mimic you, even if subconsciously at first. Help a younger child notice their belly move up and down, or, with an older child, use finger, box, or bumblebee breathing.

Allow them to choose an activity that soothes their nervous system such as playing with a sensory toy, doing a puzzle, moving their body, or laying with a weighted blanket.

7. Share reflections

This is a time, once your child feels seen, heard, validated, and receptive, to explore what they could do differently next time, and prompt making amends if needed. Positively reinforce your child’s courageous work of noticing and managing their big expressions.

8. Return to routine

Avoid harping on the moment, but rather use it as a learning opportunity to build brainpower and connection. When your child is ready, encourage moving back into the routine of their day.

Connection is just as contagious as fear. The goal is not for your child to be void of emotional outbursts but to support and help them through the process. These steps can be completed in a Calming Corner or wherever your child is at the moment.

Generation Mindful’s Time-In ToolKit guides parents in all eight steps to help the adults and children of a household notice, regulate, and de-escalate. When we practice co-regulation with our children, they develop skills to calm their nervous systems in the face of triggers, they learn that it is safe to feel, and they begin to ask for what they want and need.

At the end of the day, remember that your child’s journey is their own. Our role as parents is to be the guide by their side, gently nurturing and loving them through all emotional states and behaviors because, after all, who they are is always love. Through de-escalation, both parent and child come through more connected, physically and emotionally.

For more support de-escalating your child’s meltdowns, check out our Ultimate Guide To Building A Calming Corner

And Using Time-Ins.

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https://genmindful.com/blogs/mindful-moments/8-ways-to-de-escalate-meltdowns-with-your-child?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0BMQAABHct4Q4NLMCh_FhGN5MWw9JPiIFMfzECuNH9WZYWXIZOPHF3yhrmAg47Biw_aem_

SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH LOVE:

3 TIPS FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING TEEN BEHAVIOR

Written by: Michael Vallejo

Teenagers go through changes during adolescence that might influence their behavior, and for that reason, setting boundaries for teens is a crucial piece of good parenting. Kids at this age need your help and support so they can make the right decisions as they become more independent.

In this article, you will learn more about managing challenging teen behavior and how to set boundaries with love.

Understanding Teen Behavior

Adolescence is a period of growth, exploration, and development. As teens crave more independence and autonomy, it's normal for them to try and push boundaries.

Moreover, they experience hormonal changes, which affect not just their physical appearance, but also their emotional state. There is also the pressure of doing well in school and considering their future. They might also struggle with their identity and be affected by peer pressure.

Additionally, research shows that risk-taking behaviors increase during puberty because of changes in the brain, which leads to reward-seeking tendencies. These behaviors decrease when transitioning to adulthood because of changes in the brain that lead to improvement in self-regulation.

All of these changes can lead to challenging behavior such as defiance, school problems, aggression, eating disorders, internet addiction, and other risk-taking behaviors. This is why they need your support during this tough time.

The Concept of Setting Boundaries with Teens

Teens need safe boundaries that can help guide them on what to do and not to do as they explore new things. These boundaries should not be seen as a barrier meant to stop their growth, but as a safe fence that allows them to try new things safely and at a controlled rate.

Boundaries can help your teen understand what behaviors

are expected of them. It can also help them make the right decisions when confronted with a challenging situation. By having clear limits, you can also let them know that you are concerned about them and make them feel supported.

Boundaries can also help teens learn to take on responsibilities and understand that certain behaviors have possible repercussions. As a parent, you are responsible for setting these boundaries so your child can grow up as a happy, independent, accountable, and respectful member of society.

Remember that you're setting these boundaries for your children out of love so you can keep them safe and happy. For instance, teenagers are continuously exposed to screens nowadays. Studies have shown that excessive screen time in teens is linked with mental health problems, so it's beneficial for them if you help set digital boundaries, like clear limits for screen use.

Three Effective Strategies for Setting Boundaries for Teens

Setting boundaries for your teen doesn't have to be difficult. Here are some effective strategies you can try:

1. Prepare before the conversation

Before you sit down with your teen for a conversation, the first step is to talk with the other parent about the most important boundaries you need to set. Examples are digital boundaries (gadget use), physical boundaries (protecting their physical space, especially with people they've just met), and curfews (whether they're driving or watching a movie with friends).

Choose a place and time when you and your child have plenty of time to discuss boundaries. Make sure that everyone is in a calm mood, so you can approach the conversation from an objective perspective.

2. Communicate rules and consequences

Communicate your expectations for your teen's behavior and the consequences for failing to reach those expectations. Make sure that they know that any action that can put them in harm's way is not acceptable. List possible situations when they need to make the right choice and help them understand the effects of risky behavior.

Additionally, it is also a good idea to teach them how to set boundaries with other people, so they can avoid unhealthy relationships and mental health issues. For instance, they should set boundaries for how other people touch them or say no to things they don't want. Always give them reminders about the importance of respecting boundaries and personal space.

When communicating with your teen, try to use a friendly and approachable tone. Aside from that, be open to feedback and address your child's questions. Always remind them that these boundaries are for their safety.

3. Shift boundaries over time

It's a good idea to shift boundaries to allow for more privileges over time, as long as you see that your teens are following your rules and being trustworthy. Teenagers need to have more autonomy as they grow and mature, and making adjustments on your part can help them gain skills that they need for adulthood.

This also applies to when your teen often breaks rules. You can reduce their privileges and let them know that good behavior is expected before they can gain back access.

Overcoming Challenges in Setting Boundaries for Your Teen

If you set boundaries suddenly, your child might react with resentment or refuse to obey your rules. That's why it is important to always remind them that you are doing this out of love and concern for them.

It is also important to remind yourself of what it was like when you were a teenager. Teens need to feel heard by their parents, so love, respect, and empathy can go a long way.

When your teenager makes mistakes and nothing seems to be going right, remind yourself that raising a teenager takes a lot of work. Try to stay calm and address their behavior so you can correct them without lashing out.

Set Boundaries To Help Your Independent Teen Stay Safe

Adolescence is a time when your teenagers are pushing for independence. With these boundary-setting tips, you'll be able to guide them as they experience new things. This way, they have the opportunity to gain new skills, learn life lessons, and practice being independent without risking their safety.

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Why Your Teen is Lying to YOU AND HOW TO HANDLE IT

Co-Written by: Marybeth Bock & Nancy Reynolds

There you are, in the grocery store grabbing a few things for dinner when you run into the mom of one of your son's friends. Striking up a conversation, she tells you how great it was to see your son last Friday night when she picked the boys up from that party they went to across town.

Party? You think to yourself. Your son told you he was spending the night at a friend's house and that they were just going to hang out, order a pizza and play video games.

Trying to hide your confusion, you tell the mom how much you loved catching up and you walk away with a smile. But inside, your mind is racing... "Why would my son lie to me?" "What is he hiding?" "What else has he lied about?"

If you've caught your teen in a lie, just know it's not the end of the world. The fact is, the vast majority of teenagers admit to lying to their parents at one time or another.

Research by Nancy Darling, an expert on teens and lying, revealed that nearly 96% of teens lie to their parents. In another study, 82% of high school and college students admitted to lying to their parents in the previous year. The bottom line is, teen lying is far more common than most parents realize.

NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Please join us in one of our support groups where you can find mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent.

Live Virtual Support Group *NEW DAY

- Second Monday at 6:30pm (MT)
- RSVP required: Contact Jolie, (308) 672-3658 or Tammy, (402) 989-2197

Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook

- Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT).
- Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.

Parenting Across Color Lines

- Fourth Tuesday of the month – for multi-racial families.
- 6:15pm at Connection Point, Lincoln. Pot Luck Supper prior to meeting.
- RSVP required – Contact Felicia, (402) 476-2273 or Jessica at <mailto:jessica@nfapa.org>

Meetup Adoptive Mom Support Group in Lincoln

- Second Friday of the month, for adoptive moms.
- 7:00-9:00 pm
- RSVP required, Felicia, (402) 476-2273

Why Do Teenagers Lie?

Because teens are getting older and tugging at the ropes of independence, it should only be expected that they might want a little more privacy in their lives, to call the shots on at least some things, and even push a few boundaries from time to time, which can lead to lying or “bending the truth.”

And, if you’ve ever caught your teen in a lie, you know... they can be quite convincing! According to one study, teenagers are, overall, the best liars out of all age groups with most teens lying to their parents, on average (gasp!), three times a day.

What Do Teens Lie About?

There’s a myriad of things teenagers might lie about, but some of the top things include:

- Their whereabouts or what they were doing
- Who they’re hanging with (friends/girlfriend/boyfriend)
- Whether a parent will be home at a friend’s house
- Whether a party is supervised or unsupervised
- Whether they vaped, consumed alcohol, or did drugs
- Whether they finished homework, studied, or finished a school project
- Whether they were speeding, texting and driving, or being a “safe driver”
- Their feelings (“Saying “I don’t really care,” or “It doesn’t bother me,” when it does.)
- Their emotions (Saying “I’m fine” when they’re not.)

Top Reasons Why Teenagers Lie

Now that we’ve settled the fact that teens are, generally speaking, notorious fibbers, let’s take a look at why they lie.

1. To assert their independence

Developmentally, our kids’ teen years are all about helping them gain autonomy and teaching them how to stand on their two feet. But quite often, there’s a gap between how much independence a parent is willing to give and how much independence a teen wants, thus, that’s where the lying comes into play.

From lying about how much homework they have and who they’re hanging with to what they spend their money on and what they do when they’re hanging with friends, teenagers might lie to feel in more control of their own lives and have more privacy.

2. To avoid getting into trouble

Your son walks in past curfew. To avoid getting a lecture (or facing consequences), he lies and says a friend asked for a ride and he had to drop them off at home. Your daughter accidentally backed the car into a post causing a dent in the back fender. When you ask her about it, she lies and denies having anything to do with it.

Getting grounded, losing car privileges, not being able to hang out with friends on a Friday night, having to do extra

chores over the weekend – few teens want to face the music when it comes to admitting fault – especially if it means there will be consequences to their actions. Rather than fess up to their mistake, they take their chances and lie.

3. To do something they know parents wouldn’t approve of

You told your daughter you didn’t want her hanging with a boy you feel is a bad influence on her. Since she knows you won’t approve, she tells you she’s going to her friend’s house after school, but instead she hangs out with the boy.

Sneaking around, lying, bending the truth – nearly every teenager has lied so they can do something they know their parents wouldn’t approve of.

While it’s another way of asserting their independence over their own lives, what most teenagers don’t realize is that sometimes, those seemingly harmless “white” (or blatant) lies can put them in serious danger.

4. To protect or defend a friend

For a lot of teens, their friends aren’t simply their friends... they’re family. And, they’d do anything to protect them – even if it involves lying to their parents. If a friend is into vaping, drinking, drugs, or sneaking out at night, for example, chances are your teen won’t share those tidbits of information with you out of fear it will either put their friend in a bad light or, worse, prompt you to forbid your teen from hanging out with them anymore.

The fact is, our teens’ friends have an enormous influence on their lives. And the desire to fit in and be accepted by their friends can be a powerful force that can trigger teens to lie.

5. To avoid embarrassment

The normal day-to-day life of a teenager can have its share of insecure feelings and embarrassing moments. Rather than tell a parent that they got turned down by a girl, that they didn’t make the team or they didn’t get asked to the dance, they might lie to save themselves the embarrassment or frustration of having their parent ask too many questions. For teens, it’s better to avoid the situation altogether by making up a lie.

6. To cover up difficult feelings & emotions

Being a teenager is hard. Especially in a world that can be judgmental, competitive, and downright scary. Many teens keep a whole lot of feelings bottled up to avoid appearing weak, to avoid questions or criticism, because they simply haven’t come to terms with how to deal with them, or because they don’t want their parents to worry. Thus, they’ll lie.

A teen who is experiencing social anxiety may lie about why they don’t want to participate in activities. A teen who is grappling with their sexuality may not want to admit who they’re attracted to. And a teen who’s been struggling with anxiety or depression may try to cover it up and claim they’re “fine” to avoid discussing it with a parent.

How to Respond to a Teen When They Lie

All teenagers – even those labeled as “good kids” by their parents – are fully capable of lying. Because most lies that teens tell are fairly harmless in nature, it’s always a good rule of thumb to try not to overreact or call your teen a “liar.” Instead, focus on the “why.”

Sit down with your teen calmly (before you slap on any disciplinary consequences) and ask them why they lied, why they felt the need to lie as opposed to coming to you with the truth, and what (if anything) they were trying to cover up.

Remember, (in most cases) it’s not their intent to deliberately hurt you. The more calm and rational you are, the more likely your teen will be to come to you and be honest moving forward.

The goal is to open the lines of communication with your teen, keep them open, and draw them closer to you – not push them away. If you fly off the handle and lose your cool, you’ll actually be perpetuating the lying by sending the message that you can’t be trusted with their secrets and they can’t come to you without you overreacting.

Of course, if you find that lying is becoming a habit with your teen, you need to establish reasonable consequences for their behavior and seek professional help if the lying is tied to seriously risky or harmful behavior. If you think your teen’s lying has become compulsive, this article from PsychCentral includes helpful information and resources.

5 Ways to Encourage Honesty in Your Teen

1. Avoid overreacting and harsh interrogations

When your teen feels like they are being interrogated or yelled at every turn, it will trigger them to become defensive and, in turn, more secretive about their life. Remember, you don’t always have to agree with your teen, (conflict between parents and teens is normal), but you always have a choice in how you respond.

2. Promote trust in your relationship

Make your teen part of the process when establishing rules and consequences that are fair and make sense to both of you. When they have a say and feel respected and heard, teens are much more apt to be honest. The best way to build trust is to create a partnership with your teen and solve problems together.

3. Be willing to negotiate

There are going to be instances when you and your teen disagree on boundaries, rules, or how much freedom you give them. Let your teen know that if they present their case in a calm, respectful manner you’ll be willing to listen. If they state a reasonable case that makes sense to you, be willing to change your rule. The more your teen feels that you’re willing to negotiate on some things, the more they’ll understand when

you have to stand your ground.

4. Be an “honest” role model

When you fess up and admit to making a mistake, when you talk openly about your successes and your failures, and when you apologize when you overreact or snap at your teen, you’re teaching them the beauty of honesty. Through you, they’ll learn that no one is perfect, that mistakes can and do happen, that oftentimes mistakes can be made right, and that dishonesty rarely makes things better in the long run.



5. Celebrate their honesty when they confide in you

It takes a lot for your teen to come to you and admit when they messed up royally, broke a rule, or lied about something. So, when they do, you need to let them know how much you appreciate their bravery and honesty. Even if consequences are in order, when they know they can come to you about anything and you won’t freak out (too much, anyway) or shame them, they’ll be far more likely to share their world with you.

Getting to the bottom of it when your teen is lying to you requires tremendous self-restraint and the ability to stay focused on your connection.


Remember, your teen isn’t trying to disappoint you, they’re simply still in the process of becoming emotionally mature and honest with both themselves and us. Take a deep breath, communicate with respect, give grace, and keep on loving them with all your heart.

Marybeth Bock, MPH, is Mom to two young adults and one delightful hound dog. She has logged time as a military spouse, childbirth educator, college instructor, and freelance writer. She lives in Arizona and thoroughly enjoys research and writing – as long as iced coffee is involved. Her work can be found on numerous websites and in two books. Follow her on Facebook and Instagram.

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STATE OF NEBRASKA



Proclamation

WHEREAS, *The family — which serves as the primary source of love, identity, self-esteem, and support — is the very foundation of our communities and our state; and*

WHEREAS, *Nebraska foster families provide a safe, secure, stable, compassionate, and nurturing home to the state’s children and youth who need a temporary home; and*

WHEREAS, *Foster families who open their homes and hearts to children whose families are in crisis play a vital role in helping children and families heal; and*

WHEREAS, *We, as a state, remain focused on keeping siblings in foster care together. For children placed in out-of-home care in FY2020-21, 61.3% were placed with their siblings, and for children that could not be placed with their siblings, 72.6% were having adequate sibling contact; and*

WHEREAS, *There are numerous individuals and public and private organizations who work to increase public awareness of the needs of children in and leaving foster care as well as of the enduring and valuable contribution of foster parents; and*

WHEREAS, *Nebraska foster families are to be commended for their selfless contribution to the welfare of our children and our society; and*


WHEREAS, *It is vitally important for us, as a state, to celebrate and support the loving commitment foster families make.*

NOW, THEREFORE, *I, Jim Pillen, Governor of the State of Nebraska, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM the month of May 2024 as*

FOSTER CARE MONTH

in Nebraska, and I do hereby urge all citizens to come forward and do something positive that will help change the lives of children and youth in foster care.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand, and cause the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska to be affixed this First Day of May, in the year of our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-four.



Attest:

[Signature]
Secretary of State

[Signature]
Governor

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Prospective Adoptive Parents!

Attend the next training:

"Spaulding: Making the Commitment to Adoption"

Come learn the tools and information
you need in this
VIRTUAL CLASS!

By
Zoom!

12-
credit
hours

Two trainings offered!

June 7, 2024 6 pm-9:30 pm
&
June 8, 2024 8 am-5:30 pm

Sept 13, 2024 6 pm-9:30 pm
&
Sept 14, 2024 8 am-5:30 pm

Register online at

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SpauldingRegistration2024>

You will be notified if Spaulding is cancelled due to low registration.

Please note times/dates of the training (Central Time).

Questions, please call 402-476-2273 or Toll-Free 877-257-0176

More information on our website: www.nfapa.org

Sponsored by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
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- Opportunity for all foster families, adoptive families and relative caregivers to be actively involved in an association by serving on committees and/or on the Executive Board
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I am a Foster/Adoptive Parent. I have fostered for _____ years.
(circle one)

I am with _____ agency.

I wish to join the effort:

- Single Family Membership** (a single foster or adoptive parent), \$25
- Family Membership** (married foster or adoptive parents), \$35
- Supporting Membership** (individuals wishing to support our efforts), \$75
- Organization Membership** (organizations wishing to support our efforts), \$150
- Friends of NFAPA**, \$5 billed Monthly

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- Other, \$ _____