

# Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

March/April 2025

N F A P A

## HOW TO HELP YOUR TEEN SURVIVE ALL THE DRAMA

*Written by Christine Carter*

Oh the drama!

Having a tween or teen means there. will. be. drama. And lots of it! But how to help your child with teen drama—that's where parents can really struggle.

Our kids face overwhelming pressure in almost every aspect of their lives and we all know that it can lead to meltdowns of epic proportions.

From ridiculously hard classes to a full calendar of extra-curricular and social activities and then sometimes there are even jobs thrown in there, their schedules are logistical nightmares.

Hormonal shifts create unpredictable mood swings, and it might seem like your teen is on a daily emotional roller coaster. Insecurities run rampant about everything from how they look and act to whether or not they fit-in, while at the same time worrying about whether or not they stand out.

And let's not forget the complicated social issues that flood their lives with faltering friendships, the emotional challenges of romantic relationships, and the relentless efforts they put into keeping up with the ever-changing plans with their peers.

Put this all together with some good old fashioned peer pressure, and welcome to the world of teenagers—spelled

D-R-A-M-A.

Every day brings new challenges for our kids who are trying to figure out how to do it all, be it all, and keep it all going through their teenage years. They are juggling so many balls and almost daily at least one falls, breaks, or explodes, leaving their entire world in pieces on the floor. And when one piece of their life is a mess, it can get magnified, causing everything else to come to a screeching halt.

We as parents can feel overwhelmed with their struggles too. Our kids experience so much stress, it becomes stressful for us. We want so badly to help them when things get hard—to somehow make things less painful, less overwhelming, less dramatic. We want this for them, but being honest, also for us. Sometimes it's just all too much.

### 3 Ways Parents Can Help Their Kids Navigate Teen Drama

The constant turmoil of teen drama can be exhausting—we get it. But the truth is, our kids need

us to be there, listen, and offer support. If we can do that for them, especially during these tumultuous teen years, we will build a trusting bond that will keep them coming back to us over and over again. And we all want that, right



## Nebraska Foster &amp; Adoptive Parent Association

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Call NFAPA at 877-257-0176 or 402-476-2273.

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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](mailto: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/NFAPA-March-April-2025>

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 3 ways to navigate teenage drama.
2. What are two goals when helping your teen survive drama?
3. List five benefits of co-parenting.
4. Fill in the Blanks. When co-parenting with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, the connections for all parties can be supported and prioritized.
5. Fill in the Blanks. 5 Simple steps to take to end teenage backtalk and disrespect.
6. True or False. Fear has a way of bringing out the worst in us. The good news is, love has a way of bringing out the best.
7. True or False. Former foster youths often live in poverty with caregivers who are elderly, single, or poorly educated and not entitled to the same financial support systems and resources that licensed foster parents have.
8. Fill in the Blanks. Only \_\_\_ of children in foster care will graduate from high school with a diploma, while only \_\_\_ will receive a four-year degree from college.
9. Fill in the Blank. "Children's grief is like jumping in and out of puddles. They can be very sad one minute and very happy the next. You need to give them opportunities to be \_\_\_\_\_."
10. True or False. Letting our kids stick by our side, and even enlisting the help of family and friends to play with or "hang out" with grieving kids can give them the extra dose of care, affection, and even distraction they desire.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 1. Actively listen to them.

Consider yourself lucky if your teen will share details about their personal lives with you—especially during adolescence. That's fantastic!

When your teen spills all their feelings and shares anything difficult they are going through, simply listen with patience and empathy. Tell them how sorry you are that they are going through this difficult thing. Validate their feelings with affirming words that are comforting, not condemning.

Don't interject your opinions or suggestions.

Don't multi-task while they're talking.

Give them your undivided attention and be present with them and tune in to what they are saying. This is the most important way you can nourish your relationship with your teen and be there for them when things get hard.

You may have strong feelings about what they are sharing. You might be surprised, offended, angry, or hurt. You may even find all the teen drama ridiculous. But this isn't about you, it's about your kid and what they are experiencing.

## 2. Sit in the mess with them.

When their world is spinning out of control, you need to be their anchor. You are the adult and they need your stability to feel secure in their mess. They don't need you to add to their teenage drama, they need you to diffuse it by being strong enough to hear what they're saying and remain calm. They need you to nod or shake your head with full investment in each detail. They need to feel like you get it and you get them, whether you do or not. This is about being IN IT with them, stretching out of your world to reach into theirs.

If you interrupt them with your thoughts and feelings about their situation, you are creating a barrier between their outpouring and your ear. Sometimes teen girls and boys just want to vent, express how they are feeling, and talk about what's going on that is upsetting them. Give them a chance to share everything and allow them to process it all out loud. Be their sounding board, their confidant, someone they can trust to not judge or criticize how they are handling things.

Also, try not to sound shocked or appalled at anything they tell you. When they are already feeling vulnerable, your teen doesn't also want to feel judged, so try to keep reminding them (and yourself) that no topic should be taboo and they should feel comfortable talking to you about anything.

And, if your teen doesn't seem to tell you anything, we get that too. Getting your teen to open up can be a challenge. Just keep staying available and listen more than you talk. If you don't hound them, they will eventually open up.

## 3. Offer your help, but let them hold the reins.

This doesn't mean you are going to give your opinion about exactly what your child should do in these circumstances. It also doesn't mean you will tell them what you will do about the situation.

This is their drama to handle unless someone's life is in danger. Remember, one of your goals as a parent is to teach your teen problem-solving skills so they can eventually manage life on their own. They need to develop coping mechanisms so they can handle heartache, adversity, conflict, and mistakes in healthy ways. These are the opportunities for them to do just that.

So how do help to our teens deal with the drama while not solving everything for them?

We ask this one simple question: "How can I help you through this?"

It's hard to hold your tongue and not offer specific suggestions, but this open-ended question puts the choice in your teen's hands about how they want you to be involved. They may have some ideas for what they need from you or they may just need you to listen because there's really nothing to do to change the situation.

If your kid asks you what you think or what they should do, then yes you have been granted permission to dive in. However, you still need to carefully choose your words when giving them advice. Remember what seems like silly teen drama to you probably feels life-altering to them.

"Brainstorm solutions together and talk about the different choices available to resolve the situation," suggests Foundations Counseling, LLC. "This empowers your teen to take control of their decisions, and their self-confidence will grow as a result. These skills may even help your child avoid drama in the future."

## Helping your teen survive the drama means playing the long game

Remind yourself of the TWO GOALS you want to accomplish:

1. Keeping a trusted relationship with your teen.
2. Helping them figure out how to get through the drama.

The most important being #1. Please don't tear them down by telling them they did something stupid or unacceptable. If they did, they most likely already know it and feel terrible. Telling them all of this again is only going to add to the drama.

Sure, you can address their behavior and possible





consequences, but be mindful that you want them to still talk to you when things get bad in the future. Remember these are the years when your kids will make mistakes, and some of them might be really big ones. Ask yourself if you want to keep the relationship healthy and strong with your teen. If the answer is yes, then be thoughtful about how you react and the words you choose.

Even as adults, what we want most is someone who will come beside us and walk through the mess with us without critical judgment, right? Our kids need that too.

They may not show it all the time, but our opinion of them matters. What we say matters. When they are in a vulnerable situation and their feelings are exposed, we can either dive in and keep them from drowning or we can be just one more hand pushing them under the water.

We need to ask ourselves what would we want in our moments of despair? Of course, our kids want that too.

Teen drama is an inevitable part of middle school and high school life. But by truly listening to them and offering help on their terms (without a side of judgment) we hold the key to dialing it all down. And the best part is that we're not only helping them, but we're helping ourselves. Teenagers create chaos, but we can restore calm to their hearts and our homes. Making all our lives a little more peaceful, at least until the next meltdown.

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# HOW TO DEAL WITH TEENAGE BACKTALK AND DISRESPECT

*Written by parentingteensandtweens*

## Teenagers often test boundaries through disrespectful behavior

I'm not sure what the hardest part is about raising teenagers. The answer is probably different for every parent. But I've learned something valuable about the hard part of dealing with their hurtful behaviors.

You know, behaviors like angsty teenage backtalk at every interaction, snarky responses to our genuine questions, judgments about our well-meaning actions, and the seemingly overnight transition into someone who appears to despise our very existence.

I don't care how many people warn us about this impending stage; nothing prepares our mom heart for the confusion and hurt that washes up onto the shore of our soul.

I mean, how is it that all the love we have poured into our child from day one— the love they have always welcomed with open arms, suddenly becomes an aggravation and intrusion and source of frustration? How is it that basic questions and requests of them are now acts of war that result in back talk and name-calling? When did we become the worst person on the planet when just yesterday we were their everything?

All we have to do is think back to when we were teens to find the answers.

## Teens disrespectfully talk back to their parents for a wide variety of reasons.

It won't take us long to remember how much we were dealing with internally when we were adolescents. Insecurity, confusion, rejection, shame, and loneliness are just a few of the everyday emotions we dealt with while trying to find our way. We wanted nothing more than to belong and to be seen by our peers. To fit in, be enough, and have value. Meanwhile, unruly hormones had their way with us, adding to the daily mix of emotional Armageddon.

If you can't remember how complicated you felt as a teen, here's a reminder of a few reasons you may be experiencing teenage backtalk in your house:

- Adolescent brains are still developing, so verbal self-control can be challenging (or nonexistent in some circumstances.)
- Teens often think they can change your mind or wear you down with their antics.
- They might want to test limits and boundaries.
- Your teen might be going through something in their own life and taking it out on you.
- Teens might be seeking attention or be frustrated that your attention is elsewhere (new baby, health issues with another family member taking up time, sending a

sibling off to college.)

If you work hard to think back and remember that you were dealing with the same mess of feelings—all of us trying to stumble our way through the turmoil, it's no wonder we struggled to find balance and normalcy and acceptance for who we were, as is.

Like our teens, the upheaval and challenges we faced in our daily lives ignited our poor behaviors and hurtful actions toward our parents. They couldn't possibly understand us when we couldn't understand ourselves.

## **You have to put yourself in your teen's shoes to deal with their poor behavior**

The aha moment for me was remembering that my teens were also dealing with these same debilitating emotions as I did when I was their age.

Then, I recognized that I was actually mirroring similar emotions as a mom.

Sobering. And so very human.

When my kids lashed out with disrespect, said very hurtful things, or rejected my love, a slow stream of insecurity, confusion, shame, and unworthiness started to trickle out of my veins.

I wanted nothing more than to feel like I still belonged in their world and longed to be seen by my child. I wanted to be enough for them and to have value as their mother.

We all do. That's the calling card of motherhood.

It's no wonder the teenage years are wrought with so much tension and inner anguish for parents and children. We are literally walking in each other's shoes, yet everything feels like we are miles apart. What a paradox.

## **It starts with taking a deep breath**

So, to save us both, I made a mental shift to see my teens as lost souls trying to make sense of a raging sea of uncertainty. Then I gave myself similar grace as I learned to swim in the same murky water.

One of us has to stop identifying our worth based on the behavior of others. And it's unlikely to be our teens because they are surrounded by peers who are all measuring themselves up against one another. That's the only thing they know how to do in the trenches of becoming independent and figuring out who they are.

But we can show them another way by doing our best to remain rooted in the truth that we are valuable and worthy just as we are regardless of how our teens act and react toward us.

Of course, this is not to say we become doormats and let them get away with blatant disrespect. It's just that we see through the meanness to the pain lurking underneath and try not to take their wrath personally.

## **Simple steps to take to end teenage backtalk and disrespect**

When I was dealing with one of my teens challenging

behaviors, I kept these five things in mind:

- **Set basic ground rules for respectful communication.** We created some boundaries that were put in place to guide our behaviors. This included no name-calling, yelling, and excessively rude behavior.
- **Take a pause.** When things got heated, I would try to take a moment to collect myself, or encourage my kids to do the same. That meant taking a few deep breaths, counting to ten, or even walking away for a bit.
- **Don't engage with certain behaviors and teenage backtalk.** I tried to ignore a snarky mumble or some eye rolling. There was just no need to acknowledge it or even let my teen know that I cared. Some negative behaviors are just silly, so I tried to focus on the disagreement instead of some of their immaturity.
- **Follow through.** This one was tough for me, but when my teens were excessively rude or broke our house rules, I did follow through with negative consequences, which usually meant they lost a certain privilege or had some additional responsibilities around the house. Punishment does not always work, but if you say there is a consequence, you need to follow through.
- **Focus on problem-solving skills instead of nagging.** Once we had a family meeting and found out that my teens didn't want a lecture every time I asked them to do a chore, and I did recognize that I rode them a bit until they got it done. So we agreed that I would write out a list of what they need to do and they could just check it off by the end of the week. I had to accept that they would get it done—even if it was down to the last second—and they had some self-accountability.

## **Accept that your relationship with your teen won't be perfect**

I wish I could say that this new way of looking at things made everything easier for me. The truth is, my kids still lash out and say hurtful things at times, even though they are in their 20s, and the sting still hurts. A lot. But the turnaround time on my heartbreak is much better.

The other truth is I still act out sometimes even though I'm two months shy of 50. Fear has a way of bringing out the worst in us. The good news is, love has a way of bringing out the best.

May we all do our best to survive the changing tides and find the strength to remain calm and hunker on through the heartache, knowing and trusting that at some point, our teens will push through these waves and find their way to the shore of our love again.

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<https://parentingteensandtweens.com/teens-can-be-vicious-with-their-words-heres-how-to-protect-your-mama-heart/>

# HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH FRIGHTENING NEWS

## What parents can do to aid scared kids in processing grief and fear in a healthy way

Writer: Harold S. Koplewicz, MD

Clinical Expert: Harold S. Koplewicz, MD

When tragedy strikes, as a parent or caregiver you find yourself doubly challenged: to process your own feelings of grief and distress, and to help your children do the same.

I wish I could tell you how to spare your children pain, when they've lost friends or family members, and fear, when disturbing events occur, especially when they're close to home. I can't do that, but what I can do is share what I've learned about how to help children cope and process disturbing events in the healthiest way.

You can't protect your children from grief, but you can help them express their feelings, comfort them, help them feel safer, and teach them how to deal with fear. By allowing and encouraging them to express their feelings, you can help them build healthy coping skills that will serve them well in the future, and confidence that they can overcome adversity.

### Break the news

When something happens that will get wide coverage, my first and most important suggestion is that you don't delay telling your children about what's happened: It's much better for the child if you're the one who tells them. You don't want them to hear from some other child, a television news report, or the headlines on the front page of the New York Post. You want to be able to convey the facts, however painful, and set the emotional tone.

### Take your cues from your child

Invite them to tell you anything they may have heard about the tragedy, and how they feel. Give them ample opportunity to ask questions. You want to be prepared to answer (but not prompt) questions about upsetting details. Your goal is to avoid encouraging frightening fantasies.

### Model calm

It's okay to let your child know if you're sad, but if you talk to your child about a traumatic experience in a highly emotional way, then they will likely absorb your emotion and very little else. If, on the other hand, you remain calm, they are likely to grasp what's important: that tragic events can upset our lives, even deeply, but we can learn from bad experiences and work together to grow stronger.

### Be reassuring

Talking about death is always difficult, but a tragic accident or act of violence is especially tough because of how egocentric children are: they're likely to focus on whether something like this could happen to them. So it's important to reassure your child about how unusual this kind of event is, and the safety



measures that have been taken to prevent this kind of thing from happening to them. You can also assure them that this kind of tragedy is investigated carefully, to identify causes and help prevent it from happening again. It's confidence-building for kids to know that we learn from negative experiences.

### Help children express their feelings

In your conversation (and subsequent ones) you can suggest ways your child might remember those they've lost: draw pictures or tell stories about things you did together. If you're religious, going to church or synagogue could be valuable.

### Be developmentally appropriate

Don't volunteer too much information, as this may be overwhelming. Instead, try to answer your child's questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available to your child is what matters. Difficult conversations like this aren't over in one session; expect to return to the topic as many times as your child needs to come to terms with this experience.

### Be available

If your child is upset, just spending time with them may make them feel safer. Children find great comfort in routines, and doing ordinary things together as a family may be the most effective form of healing.

### Memorialize those who have been lost

Drawing pictures, planting a tree, or sharing stories can all be good, positive ways to help provide closure to a child. It's important to assure your child that a person continues to live on in the hearts and minds of others. Doing something to help others in need can be very therapeutic: it can help children not only feel good about themselves but learn a very healthy way to deal with grief.

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[https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-cope-frightening-news/?fbclid=IwY2xjaWHyYs9leHRuA2FibQlxMQABHYkopunTzst3DSKTEgQAqxQhb30oYZVfnnv5GqMjYu mwzD9HF2gxB4SIXNQ\\_aem\\_vX7YJmfYtPw5ZFMPvll0Nw](https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-cope-frightening-news/?fbclid=IwY2xjaWHyYs9leHRuA2FibQlxMQABHYkopunTzst3DSKTEgQAqxQhb30oYZVfnnv5GqMjYu mwzD9HF2gxB4SIXNQ_aem_vX7YJmfYtPw5ZFMPvll0Nw)



# Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association



## FREE Virtual In-Service Training

9:00 am-11:00 am  
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For Foster, Adoptive,  
Guardianship, Kinship &  
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Identify Your Need

Gather  
Information

Analyze  
Guidelines

Weigh  
Options

Decide

Register

Attend!

Date		Title & Trainer
<input type="checkbox"/>	April 5, 2025	<b>Child Abuse Hotline and Reporting Abuse &amp; Neglect</b> By Susan Ward, Hotline Deputy Administrator
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 7, 2025	<b>FASD 2.0</b> By Barb Clark, Director of Training for Families Rising
<input type="checkbox"/>	September 13, 2025	<b>De-escalation Training: Understanding the Arc of Escalating Behaviors</b> By Jaclyn Kodosky, Families Rising
<p><b>Questions? 402-476-2273 or <a href="mailto:Corinne@nfapa.org">Corinne@nfapa.org</a></b></p> <p><b>Facilitated by NFAPA.</b></p> <p><b>Sponsored by the Nebraska Department of Health &amp; Human Services.</b></p>		



# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CO-PARENTING IN FOSTER OR KINSHIP CARE

Welcoming a child to your family through foster care or helping raise a relative's child is a significant change for all involved. You are giving this child a safe space to land when their parents need time to get back on their feet and hopefully resume parenting from a position of strength and healing. Co-parenting while all that is going on can feel daunting, especially if the relationship between you and this child's parents is fraught. However, developing a healthy functional relationship with the child's parents is good for the child, parents, and caregivers.

## Five Benefits of Co-Parenting

Understandably, when a child has suffered impacts from neglect, abuse, or substance abuse disorders, it's tempting to draw rigid boundaries or cut off contact to protect this child from further trauma. However, everyone can benefit when all the child's adults can come to a place of shared care and nurture while keeping the child's best interests at the center of the relationship.

## Parenting a Child Exposed to Trauma

When co-parenting with kindness, respect, and intention, the connections for all parties can be supported and prioritized. With their adults experiencing calmer, connected relationships, the child may struggle less and exhibit fewer behavior issues. Here are some additional benefits of co-parenting in foster or kinship care.

### 1. Reduced Sense of Divided Loyalties

In a functional co-parenting relationship, your foster child or grandchild (or niece or nephew) is less likely to feel as if they must choose between their biological parent(s), foster parents, or kinship caregivers (grandparents, aunts, etc.).

### 2. Decreased Stress

When you can partner with the child's biological parents in parenting decisions and planning, you can all experience less conflict and stress about contact, visits, legal proceedings, school events, and so on. Less drama will reduce stress for everyone.

### 3. Smoother Transitions

Regardless of the changes this child will experience (moving to permanency in your home, reunification with biological family, changing schools, etc.), co-parenting with intention can pave the way for smoother transitions.

### 4. Increased Collaboration

When this child's birth parents know that you are not "out to get their child," they are likely to be more willing to work with you over things like helping their child accept your

authority or communicating that they are safe in your care. Their willingness to work together increases the likelihood that this child will work with you on behavior, healing, etc.

## 5. Opportunities to Model Adult Relationships

Co-parenting with respect, kindness, and consideration for all parties means you get plenty of opportunities to model healthy adult relationships for the children in your lives. And when dynamics are challenging, you can show your grandchild or foster child how to navigate difficult circumstances.

## Co-Parenting is Worth the Effort!

While you and this child's parents figure out how to come to productive co-parenting, it can feel awkward, frustrating, and even triggering – especially if you have a significant history with the parents. But hang in there and keep trying to move forward with your efforts, even if sometimes you must drop back and regroup to find a new way to approach this relationship. Your foster or kinship child deserves to have all the adults in their life on the same page, co-parenting to support them toward healing and stability

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<https://creatingafamily.org/kinship/kinship-blog/what-are-the-benefits-of-co-parenting-in-foster-or-kinship-care/>

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# SUCCESSFULLY AGE OUT OF FOSTER CARE AND BEGIN LIFE ON YOUR OWN

*By Dr. John DeGarmo*

Each year, between 20,000 to 25,000 foster children age out of the system and attempt to begin life on their own. For many foster children, foster care is a temporary service before returning home to a parent, moving in with a biological family member, or even beginning a new life in an adopted home. Yet, for thousands who do not find reunification with family in their lives, reaching 18-21 years of age (depending on their state) and finding themselves no longer part of the foster care system, can be a tremendously frightening experience.

## Do

- teach children living skills
- consider kinship help
- help envision life options beyond foster care
- be an agent of change

## Don't

- ignore medical care needs
- ignore issues of trauma
- downplay education
- forget about sex education and family planning counseling





### **Do teach children living skills**

Simple independent living skills are lacking for many children who age out of the foster care system. Skills such as cooking meals, driving a car, finding housing, keeping appointments, managing a bank account, shopping for groceries and household items, and taking public transportation are missing in many children who age out. These basic, yet necessary, independent living skills are very often not taught, whether by parental figures and adults, or while in school. As soon as your foster child is ready, begin teaching the fundamentals of personal financial responsibility by helping to develop simple money skills. Help your child open and manage a personal bank account, as well as make and balance a budget. Allow your child to learn how to cook for himself. Teach your child how to clean and take care of a household. Use public transportation with your child. Practice filling out job and college applications.

### **Do consider kinship help**

For some former foster youth, housing with kinship carers may be an option. Kinship care is the practice of placing youths in home of extended relatives and family members, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, and others related to the youth. Kinship carers can be very helpful to those who age out, providing a home, a family, and general support and assistance. Though housing with kinship carers may provide more stability, research does indicate that many of these former foster youths often live in poverty with caregivers who are elderly, single, or poorly educated and not entitled to the same financial support systems and resources that licensed foster parents have. Thus, kinship carers often provide only partial assistance to youths after they age out.

### **Do help envision life options beyond foster care**

Stress the importance of education and encourage your child to graduate from high school, with the possibility of college, technical school, or military service as important options beyond secondary school.

### **Do be an agent of change**

Perhaps the biggest impact one can make for those who have aged out of the system is to become an advocate of change. By contacting lawmakers, politicians, and publicity agents through emails, letters, phone calls, website postings and other means, you can bring attention to the needs of these young adults who are facing a series of challenges after leaving the foster care system. By lobbying for change, you can inform the general public and push authorities to enact needed new laws or administrative changes to assist youths aging out of the foster care system.

### **Do not ignore medical care needs**

Proper health care also remains a problem for former foster youth. Many simply do not have someone to care for them when they fall sick or face medical emergencies. In addition, many suffer from health problems related to maternal substance abuse, parental neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. While under the foster care system, foster children do receive free health care through Medicaid. Yet, when a youth ages out, this healthcare is no longer provided, leaving as many as 55% without any type of insurance or care. Access to mental health and additional support organizations is also difficult to come by, with only 25% of former foster children on Medicaid. To help, consistently talk to your foster child about the importance of regular medical and mental check ups. Help your foster child register for Medicaid, or other forms of medical insurance before they age out. Look for signs of physical or emotional illness in your foster child, and see that they are getting the care they need before they age out.

### **Do not ignore issues of trauma**

Countless former foster children have untreated mental health needs. Recent studies have found that adults who have spent time in foster care suffer from the ravages of post-traumatic stress disorder, at rates double those of US combat veterans. Many youths who leave foster care also suffer from a number of other mental health disorders, including depression, high anxiety levels, and mental illnesses. Look for signs of trauma in your foster child on a consistent basis, and report any you might see to your child's caseworker. Talk to your child's doctor about how to best address the trauma. Schedule appointments with an approved counselor.

### **Do not downplay education**

Only 45% of children in foster care will graduate from high school with a diploma, while only 2% will receive a four year degree from college. Those who do not graduate from high school find it difficult to obtain a job that will be able to provide for them financially. This leads some foster children who age out to turn to drug dealing and other criminal activity for financial support. Up to 70% of those incarcerated at any given time in the United States have had some experience with foster care in their lives — often because they aged out of the system without adequate educational and life skills. After

school and college tutoring programs are helpful to those who have aged out, as they not only help the young adult with the material being studied, but also help develop stronger study learning skills. Make sure your child is receiving all available help while in high school. As they age out prepare them to seek out college tuition scholarships and assistance sources, as well as agencies or programs that may help with school supplies.

### **Do not forget about sex education and family planning counseling**

Females who have spent time in foster care are at greater risk for early age pregnancy. Indeed, nearly 40% of girls are pregnant by age 21. Young men who age out of the system may unexpectedly find themselves fathers and be unable to properly provide for the child. Tragically, for many former foster youth, the cycle continues from generation to the next, as 19% of parents who were former foster children reported having their own children removed from their home and placed into the supervision of foster care. Talk to your foster teen about the realities of being a parent, and do so on a consistent basis. Encourage them to choose options and activities that will focus their attentions elsewhere and point them towards a positive future, such as school clubs, sports, music, and theatre. Be consistent in their lives on a daily basis, and make yourself available for conversation on this topic, and any other topic they might wish to discuss.

### **Summary**

Most teens, when leaving home for the first time, are able to still rely on their parents or family members for advice, assistance, and support. For those foster teens that age out of the system, this is not the case. Instead, leaving care is often a time of anxiety, fear, and danger, as the state and their former foster families are no longer required to help them or provide assistance. Instead, foster teens are expected to fend for themselves; sink or swim, so to speak, with many sinking quickly in dangerous and uncharted waters. With some skills and knowledge taught beforehand by foster parents and agencies, mentoring and assistance after they age out, foster teens will be better equipped to succeed as they enter into the adult world.

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<https://expertbeacon.com/successfully-age-out-foster-care-and-begin-life-your-own/>

# **SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH LOVE: 3 TIPS FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING TEEN BEHAVIOR**

*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.

*Reprinted with permission from:*

<https://parentingteensandtweens.com/setting-boundaries-for-your-teen/>

## WHEN CHILDREN GRIEVE: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM TODDLERS TO TEENS

*By Michael Vallejo*

When grief has seized control of our lives, we want to know—how long will the suffering last? When children grieve, the question becomes even more imperative.

*Will the nightmares ever subside?*

*Will my son find joy in playing his instrument again?*

### 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.

#### 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>

#### 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



*Will my daughter smile again during our family game night?*

We can't bear to see them in pain any longer than necessary—let alone at all.

Unfortunately, grief has no exact expiration. Nor does it play by the rules. The depth and duration depends on each child and each situation. And at least a portion of grief can stay with a child forever.

Many of us are familiar with the commonly referenced stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But perhaps fewer of us know that these grief stages, which can also be seen in children, aren't set in stone. In fact, it would be rare for grief to ever appear exactly as these stages describe or in such a specific order.

So, what can we expect from children mourning tragedy, death, and loss?

### Re-Defining the Phases of Grief

Perhaps the best way to define the progression of grief is that we can't define it. Yet one reason the five stages of grief have become so widespread could be the sense of structure and reliability they convey. They offer sufferers specific feelings to look for and expect.

Even though we've established that grief follows no guidelines, it's easy to understand that people still want a concrete prescription to turn to. One possible alternative is Dr. Alan Wolfelt's 6 Needs of Mourning.

In it, he describes what all mourners experience at some point along their journey. This includes: acknowledging the reality of the death, embracing the pain of the loss, remembering the person who died, developing a new self-identity, searching for meaning, and receiving ongoing support from others.

While we can look for and recognize the processes our grieving children are going through, there are other common grief responses that children exhibit.

The intensity of these responses can vary, and they likely won't appear in a particular order. The emotions stemming from their grief may also range from confused, scared, and angry to anxious, depressed, and numb—and everything in between.



### Typical Grief Responses in Children Regression in Behavior and at School

A certain amount of regression in grieving children is normal. A night-trained 6-year old might start bedwetting, or a 4-year-old might start sucking his thumb.

A twelve-year-old that kicked the whining habit years ago might start up again. A teenager might forego her usual chores or avoid any extra responsibilities.

Unfortunately, behavior and progress at school can alter just as much as it does at home. A well-behaved pre-schooler might start getting in trouble by pushing friends on the playground or being disruptive at circle time. An advanced, all "A's" high-school student might start failing classes or forget to attend his extracurricular activities.

While we want to keep our kids on track as much as possible, we can be assured that the sudden setbacks are very likely a result of the grief they're weathering. They're simply overwhelmed—both mentally and emotionally.

It may be hard to see regression as anything but negative, but allowing grieving children some leniency is important. We can also remind ourselves that as children work through grief at their own pace, they'll eventually return to the same level of success, independence, and functionality they had before their loss.

### Separation Anxiety/Clinginess

Grief is a time when children may not want to be left alone. Little ones might cry when we leave the house—or even leave the room—more than they once did. Older kids could choose to tag along with us on errands they've avoided before.

When overcome with grief, children might find solitude not only intimidating, but unbearable. Maybe, after the loss of an older family member, they have a heightened fear of being abandoned. Or, perhaps they're just afraid of their thoughts. Regardless, any needy, helpless, and unusually attached behavior reflects a need for companionship and emotional connection.

Letting our kids stick by our side, and even enlisting the help of family and friends to play with or "hang out" with grieving kids can give them the extra dose of care, affection, and even distraction they desire.

It's also common for grieving kids to connect with a person, either a familiar face or a new one, that reminds them of a lost loved one. This can be beneficial and might fill a void—just as long as it's understood that their loved one can never be fully replicated or replaced (which would also be an unfair—and impossible—standard for anyone to live up to).

### Apathy or Withdrawal

It's not unusual for children to sometimes act as though a loss never even occurred.

While children may appear unaffected by tragedy, death, or loss, this is likely far from the case. Maybe they're unwilling to confront the loss just yet, can only handle grief for brief



spurts of time, or are modeling the restrained reactions of their parents or caregivers.

Children can also step in and out of grief more easily than adults.

*“Children’s grief is like jumping in and out of puddles. They can be very sad one minute and very happy the next. You need to give them opportunities to be both.”*

– Julia Samuel, British psychotherapist and counselor.

So while kids might be playful and acting normally one minute, they can also withdraw socially from friends and avoid activities the next.

They may also seem numb to things around them—like being uninterested in the fun day at the water park you’ve planned, the movie their friends are attending, or the fact that grandpa and grandma are flying in for a visit. In this case, the grief-like depression—is taking the joy out of normally pleasurable events.

On some level this is normal, especially considering the recency of the loss. But it’s always good to keep a close eye on signs of depression and anxiety. If you’re concerned, consider finding your child a counselor or therapist.

## **Physical Ailments & Sleep/Appetite Disturbances**

We know that common stressors can keep us up all night, morph into back and shoulder pain, and even appear as bodily tics and twitches.

Imagine what grief can do.

We can expect a certain amount of sleeplessness, nightmares, and/or night terrors from a grieving child. We can expect a loss of appetite or bingeing on comfort foods.

But we can also see grief in a variety of physical ailments. It might be a teenager’s headache that has lasted for days or a toddler’s frequently upset tummy.

It’s helpful to know these physical responses can be common; but again, it’s important to see a doctor when we have concerns.

## **Guilt**

Guilt is very common among anyone grieving death and loss, and children are no exception.

Younger children, when they don’t fully understand the concepts of death, may feel they’re responsible for the loss—especially when they’re wired to be more preoccupied with their own needs and have the belief that everything in the world revolves around them.

A preschooler who hit her friend—after she stole her toy last week—may feel she’s the reason her young friend tragically passed away.

Older kids are also susceptible to guilt. A teenager who gave his friend the cold shoulder last month may feel partly to blame when that depressed, bullied friend takes his own life.

Naturally, it’s of ultimate importance to remind children they are not responsible for these tragic events. We need to also consider that it may take time and additional resources—

like consistent counseling—for them to understand this fact.

## **Interest in Death**

Grieving kids might ask questions about tragedy and loss repeatedly. Young kids might become interested in dead things like the upside-down beetle in the driveway and the lifeless bird on the porch. Older children might become drawn to darker themes in books, music, movies, and video games.

Even kids that aren’t dealing with grief are commonly obsessed with the morbid and bleak. They are trying to understand the world around them and the challenging concepts that even adults fail to grasp.

A loved one’s death or personal loss just intensifies these questions.

## **Risk-Taking & Aggression**

One of the most distressing aspects of grief is the possibility that children will internalize it in a negative way.

Older children, especially, might engage in risky behavior. *“They may drive recklessly, get into fights, drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or use drugs. They may become involved in sexual activity or delinquency.”* After a Loved One Dies—How Children Grieve by David J Schonfeld, MD

Younger children can also express their grief through hostility and/or self-harm. A 5-year-old girl struggling with anger from her parents’ divorce might start bullying her younger brother or try pulling out her own hair.

Aggression, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts can all emerge during times of grief. Naturally, it’s imperative to intervene in any of these situations with professional assistance as quickly as possible.

## **Psychological Changes**

Another serious concern is the prospect of grief leaving life-long, psychological implications. Children are still developing mentally—with rapidly evolving brains, personalities, and intellect—and it’s possible that grief can leave an intense, life-shaping impression.

*Studies of adults with various mental disorders, especially depression, frequently reveal childhood bereavement, suggesting that such loss may precipitate or contribute to the development of a variety of psychiatric disorders and that this experience can render a person emotionally vulnerable for life. This special vulnerability of children is attributed to developmental immaturity and insufficiently developed coping capacities.*—Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences, and Care

Regardless of these implications, please don’t be disheartened. By no means is it a foregone conclusion that children struck by tragedy, death, and loss will have challenging futures.

On the contrary, grief can strengthen children and give them a greater appreciation for the beauty and complexity of life. But, grieving children do need appropriate support from loved ones and constructive coping mechanisms to shape their grief as positively as possible. The book *Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences, and Care*, states that children with

a reliable adult addressing their needs—including the need to explore and express feelings of grief—can adapt and overcome loss in a healthy, positive way.

## Disenfranchised and Secondary Grief

### Disenfranchised Grief

Not all grief comes from death or tragedy. Children can feel intense sorrow from a variety of other situations and need to process these changes the same way other grievers do.

This is called disenfranchised grief.

It's so-named because the cause of this grief isn't considered—at least by society at large—a “justifiable” reason to mourn. Regardless, it is felt acutely by the person it affects and can't simply be dismissed or ignored.

A 3-year-old could experience disenfranchised grief after the death of her pet gerbil. It could be a foster child distraught over moving to a new home. Maybe it's your teenager, devastated after his girlfriend broke up with him. Or, it could be a preteen struggling with the reaction she received when she told her parents she's gay.

No one, especially a parent, has the right to tell a child that his or her feelings are unworthy, unnecessary, or insignificant. No matter the cause, our feelings are often out of our control. This is especially true for children still learning to manage their raw emotions. Teaching a child how to cope with grief, rather than dismiss it, will help them more than anything.

### Secondary Loss/Grief

Secondary losses **result** from a primary loss. Essentially, they're the collateral damage produced by death, tragedy, and grief.

If your 10-year-old daughter just had to move to a new school due to your recent divorce from her father, the grief she feels from the loss of her school and friends would be secondary to the loss she feels from the divorce.

Just like disenfranchised grief, secondary losses may not be accepted or appreciated for their potential severity. If we are aware of them, however, we can better prepare our children and ourselves to cope with these added stressors.

The secondary losses and disenfranchised grief of a family member or friend can also affect a child. We all know that depression doesn't just hurt the people it affects. It harms all of the people that love them, too. So when a child's parent or caregiver is grieving, whether it's about bankruptcy, the death of a coworker, or a crisis of faith, children may grieve, too.

### When to Seek Help

If all of these grief responses are common, when is it important to seek help? Especially if there are no set guidelines or timelines for grief?

Again, any signs of aggression or self-harm need to be addressed by a mental health specialist immediately. But for other common, less severe responses, the answer is less clear.

One of the best indicators that children are progressing

healthily through grief is when the intensity and frequency of their grief responses lessen over time. If a teenager is averaging a little more sleep each week, he is improving. If a 5-year-old starts playing with her friends despite frequent tears, then she is recovering.

But, what if symptoms persist—or escalate?

According to the Child Mind Institute, “...*symptoms that persist beyond six months or are very impairing can indicate that your child may need professional help to overcome her grief.*”

These symptoms can include the more common grief responses; from sleep and appetite disturbances to regression and apathy. If they worsen or linger longer than the six-month time frame, it's time to seek professional help from a grief counselor, support group, or psychiatrist.

### Final Thoughts

Loss is both heart-wrenching and unavoidable at some point in all of our lives. While we hope our children will avoid exposure to death and loss in their childhood, we can't always protect them from life's most painful realities.

It could be a few weeks before they crack a smile or a few months before they laugh out loud. To a certain degree, some of the grief will always be a part of them.

But with our help and love, grief will never define them.

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<https://www.positiveparentingsolutions.com/uncategorized/child-grief-at-all-ages>

## Scholarship Program

### NEBRASKA FOSTER & ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION \$250 Scholarship Program

The NFAPA offers a scholarship up to \$250 for an adoptive, foster, guardianship, or kinship child, who wishes to further their education beyond high school or GED. This can be either at a college or university, vocational and job training, or online learning. One or more scholarships may be awarded based on scores and amount of money available for scholarships.

Please go to <https://forms.gle/4nfHVt1MrUV7jPxH7> to complete the application and upload required documentation. Completed application must be received on or before April 11, 2025..

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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
- Working to instigate changes by alertness to legislation affecting the child welfare system
- An advocate on your behalf at local, state and national levels
- 25% of membership dues goes toward an NFAPA Scholarship

### Thank you for your support!

Please mail membership form to:  
**NFAPA, 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D  
Lincoln, NE 68521.**

**Questions? Please call us at 877-257-0176.**

NFAPA is a 501c3 non-profit organization comprised of a volunteer Board of Directors and Mentors.

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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:

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