

Module 4. Effective communication and social-emotional learning (SEL) for parents

Objectives:

- Help parents develop age-appropriate communication strategies.
- Teach parents to communicate effectively using SEL skills.

Summary of content:

- What communication is, what types of communications people use.
- Teach parents active listening skills, empathy and non-judgmental communication.
- Establishing the connection between SEL skills and bullying prevention.
- Introduce SEL to parents and develop SEL-based positive emotional regulation strategies and conflict resolution.

Lesson 1. Parent-child communication

An important component of the parent – child relationship is communication. The way parents and their children communicate is pivotal in defining roles, boundaries, disciplinary strategies, and relationships (Lee, 2009).

Communication in the parent –child relationship also influences child behaviour. Children who have better (i.e., clear and direct) communication with their parents are less influenced by their peers than children who have poorer communication (Lee, 2009). Children from families with better communication exhibit more positive behaviours towards their classmates, as opposed to more bullying behaviour (Lee, 2009). In contrast, children who have poor communication patterns with their parents, where they feel rejected and unsupported, are at higher risk of developing behaviour problems (Offrey & Rinaldi, 2014).

Descriptive statistics from Offrey and Rinaldi's (2014) study, that overall, the most common type of solutions used across all of the scenarios were help-seeking (36%). Help-seeking is about communicating an issue or challenge to obtain support, advice or help. Asking for help can act as a protective factor for a child or young person's mental health and wellbeing. Getting support early can help prevent small issues or challenges continuing, or even getting bigger. The next most common types of solutions reported by students were assertive (29%) and non-confrontational (20%). Aggressive solutions comprised approximately 11% of all solutions provided by students, and finally, passive solutions made up nearly 4% of the total solutions (Offrey & Rinaldi, 2014).

"Communication is done on three levels: logical, verbal and nonverbal. Out of these, the logical level (of words) is only 7% of the total act of communication; 38% occurs at the paraverbal level (tone, volume, speed of speech) and 55% at non-verbal level (facial expression, position, movement, clothing etc.) (Runcat et al., 2012).

Humans, needless to say, communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs to others,

determining the situation they correspond to and the person sharing with them. But what are the types of communication?

❖ Here are two examples for each type of communication between a parent and a child who is being bullied at school:

1. Passive communication

Passiveness is characterised by seeking over-attention to the opinions and needs of others and holding back their views and needs. Like others, the passive is constantly under pressure to think they have no rights. Therefore, they are constantly apologetic and self-conscious about partaking. Teenagers often fidget, nod heads, or smile in agreement, lower their voices, and are hesitant when they are ambivalent, leading them to the strategy of conflict avoidance or maintaining low self-esteem (Jandhyala & Kumar, 2024). Examples include passive statements and body language followed by giving the "silent treatment". Example 1: A parent says to the child, "I guess if you don't want to talk about it, that's okay. Just remember, I'm here if you need anything." This may leave the child feeling unsupported if they do want to discuss their feelings but are hesitant.

Example 2: A parent notices the child is upset but instead of asking directly about the bullying, they say, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," indicating the child should not feel pressured to communicate.

2. Aggressive communication

Aggressiveness often includes imposing one's opinions or needs on others, dispositioning the rights of others. Aggressive communicators often struggle with a lack of empathy, are interruptive, blame others instead of owning their issues, and lack positive regard or gratitude (Jandhyala & Kumar, 2024). Aggressive communicators can become easily frustrated, speak in a loud or overbearing way or be unwilling to compromise. Frequently interrupts or does not listen, and can be disrespectful towards others.

- Example 1: A parent confronts the child angrily, saying, "You need to stand up for yourself! If you let them push you around, you're just weak!" This can create additional stress or fear in the child rather than empowering them.

- Example 2: A parent might shout at the child, "Why are you letting them bully you? You should make them regret it!" This places blame on the child and fails to create a safe environment for discussion.

3. Passive-aggressive communication

A passive-aggressive communication style mixes elements of the passive and aggressive styles. It derives from mixed feelings, wanting on the one hand to control while being too cautious to come out and say it. A person who is passive-aggressive will have surrendered a point but not their anger over having done so, which they can't or won't express directly. Instead, they will pursue a course of indirect aggression and even sabotage to achieve their

goal or to revenge themselves on those they believe have frustrated them.

Instead of directly addressing a problem or expressing emotions in a clear and honest manner, the parent may use subtle hints, sarcasm, guilt-trips, or avoidance to convey their feelings.

- Example 1: A parent expresses frustration indirectly, saying, "I guess some kids just have it worse than you," while avoiding discussing the bullying directly. This can confuse the child and feel dismissive of their experiences.
- Example 2: A parent may give the child the silent treatment after the child talks about their bullying, making the child feel guilty for expressing their feelings.

4. Assertive communication

Assertiveness is "standing up for one's rights, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a direct, honest, and appropriate way". Assertiveness is a skill reinforced and mastered when having an awareness of the situation and empathy towards the receiver. Assertiveness also focuses on rejecting unrealistic requests, relieving the self to change their perspective on the situation and mood to express themselves honestly, thereby improving self-esteem (Jandhyala & Kumar, 2024).

- Example 1: A parent calmly asks the child, "I noticed you seem upset. Can you tell me more about what's happening at school? I want to help." This encourages open dialogue and shows support.
- Example 2: A parent expresses understanding, saying, "I can see how hurtful that must be. Let's talk about how you want to handle it together. It's important that you feel safe at school."

Let's take a moment and think about:

What communication style do you find yourself using most often with your teenager—passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, or assertive? Why do you think that is?

How do you typically respond when your teenager is facing a difficult situation, like bullying? Do you address the issue directly, or do you avoid it or express frustration indirectly?

After learning about different communication styles, how might you adjust your approach to better support your teenager, especially when they're going through a tough time?

If your teenager were to describe your communication style, what do you think they would say? Would they feel comfortable approaching you with their concerns or emotions?

Here are some tips for parents to improve their communication with the teenager:

- **Active listening:** is the practice of fully focusing on what your teen is saying without interrupting, judging, or formulating a response before they finish. It's about giving

your undivided attention to show that you value their words and emotions.

Put aside distractions like your phone or TV when your teen is talking. Make eye contact and nod to show you're engaged. If your teen says, "I'm really frustrated with my teacher," stop what you're doing and focus on them. Repeat or paraphrase what they've said to confirm your understanding. "It sounds like you're upset because you feel your teacher isn't being fair." Let them finish speaking before responding, even if you disagree or want to offer advice. If they're explaining why they're upset, hold back from jumping in with a solution until they've finished.

- **Empathy:** the ability to understand and share your teen's feelings, even if you don't agree with their perspective. It involves validating their emotions and showing that you care.

Avoid minimizing their emotions or saying things like, "It's not a big deal." Instead, validate what they're experiencing. If your teen says, "I feel so left out at school," respond with, "That sounds really tough. I can see why you'd feel hurt." Try to see the situation from their perspective, even if it seems minor to you (Remember how important peer approval felt when you were a teenager.) Sometimes, teens just need to vent rather than hear solutions. Let them know you're there to listen. Instead of saying, "Here's what you should do," try, "That sounds challenging. What do you think might help?" (Of course, if your teen can't think of something appropriate to do, jump in and offer practical support).

- **Non-judgmental communication:** involves responding to your teen without criticism, blame, or dismissiveness. Helps prevent your teen from feeling criticized, blamed, or dismissed, which builds trust and reinforces your role as a supportive figure in their life.

Speak calmly and avoid sarcasm, which can come across as mocking. Instead of saying, "Why would you do something so silly?" try, "Can you help me understand why you chose to do that?" If your teen makes a mistake, focus on understanding rather than assigning fault. If they fail a test, avoid saying, "You didn't study hard enough." Instead, try, "What do you think happened, and how can I help you prepare next time?" Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements to express concerns without sounding accusatory. Say, "I feel worried when I see you staying up late," rather than, "You're ruining your health by staying up late."

Practice for parents:

1. **Practice active listening:** Have a family meeting or one-on-one with your teen where you actively listen without interrupting. Reflect what they say, ask clarifying questions, and resist offering immediate solutions.
2. **Empathy check:** After a conversation, ask yourself: Did I acknowledge my teen's feelings? Did I validate their experience? Practice responding with phrases like, "That must be really hard," or "I understand how that could make you feel upset."
3. **Non-judgmental language:** Let your teen know they can come to you anytime

without fear of judgment. Remind them regularly that you are available to listen and that you care about their well-being. When talking to your teen, pay attention to your tone and wording. Avoid using words like "should," "why," or "that's not a big deal." Instead, try, "I can see how you'd feel that way," or "It makes sense that you're feeling frustrated."

4. **Avoid minimizing their feelings:** Statements like "It's just kids being kids" or "Don't let it bother you" can make your teen feel invalidated. Instead, acknowledge how serious bullying can be and how it affects them emotionally.
5. **Normalize seeking help:** Reinforce the idea that asking for help from trusted adults or professionals (like school counselors or therapists) is a sign of strength, not weakness. Sometimes teens feel they should handle everything on their own, but seeking help is a healthy, constructive way to cope with bullying.
6. **Model healthy responses:** Show your teen how to handle challenging situations calmly and respectfully. Demonstrating healthy coping strategies in your own life can serve as a powerful example.
7. **Creating a safe home environment:** A supportive environment at home encourages resilience, making it easier for teens to navigate difficulties at school, including peer pressure or bullying. Parents can regularly reassure their teens that they are always welcome to discuss any issue, no matter how big or small.
8. **Identifying warning signs of bullying:** Early detection is key in preventing the negative effects of bullying, such as depression or anxiety. Parents can use their communication skills to ask non-threatening questions and gather information about their child's school life and social experiences. If a teen is withdrawing or showing signs of distress, a parent might ask, "I've noticed you seem upset lately. Is there something going on at school that's bothering you?"

Let's think of a fictitious situation that could happen:

Teen: "I feel like I'm constantly trying to fit in with the cool kids, but nothing I do seems to be enough. They still ignore me, and it makes me feel terrible about myself." Parent (Active listening & empathy):

"It sounds like you're feeling like you have to constantly change who you are just to get their attention or acceptance, and that can be exhausting. I can understand how much that would hurt, especially when you're giving so much effort and not seeing any reward." Parent (non-judgmental communication):

"You don't have to be anything other than yourself to be accepted or valued. You're enough just the way you are. It's okay to not fit in with every group, and there are people who will appreciate you for who you really are. I'm proud of you for recognizing that."

Lesson 2. Introducing SEL for parents

SEL focuses on developing social interaction skills to reduce students' exposure to bullying, support the formation of friendships and peer connections, and thereby lessen the long-term negative impacts of bullying (Smith & Low, 2013). Social emotional learning (SEL) is a programme designed to help children, teenagers and adults acquire skills in order to understand and process their emotions, shape their behavior, enhance critical thinking in ways that lead to positive life outcomes.

Research shows that SEL not only enhances emotional intelligence but also plays a role in reducing bullying behaviors and their long-term effects (Smith & Low, 2013; Espelage & De La Rue, 2015).

How using SEL in your parenting help with bullying?

SEL helps children recognize and regulate their emotions, reducing impulsive behaviors that can lead to bullying. A focus on empathy and perspective-taking further minimizes aggressive actions (Espelage et al., 2018).

Children with strong SEL skills are more likely to build supportive friendships and avoid toxic dynamics, which are often precursors to bullying (You et al., 2023).

SEL promotes a school culture that values inclusion and mutual respect, discouraging bullying and other forms of peer victimization. It empowers bystanders to intervene positively, shifting group dynamics away from passive complicity to active support (Nickerson et al., 2019).

What are the main SEL skills and how can parents help?

The main SEL skills that you can help your child develop are:

Self-awareness: The ability to understand one's emotions, thoughts, and values, and how they influence behavior. It includes recognizing strengths and limitations.

Parent tips:

- Teach your child a wide range of words to describe their emotions, such as "happy," "frustrated," "nervous," or "excited.". It may seem very easy for teenagers, but not all of them have a proper ability to recognize their own emotions.
- Share your feelings to normalize talking about emotions: "I felt really proud when I finished my work project today. How did you feel after your art class?"
- Talk about how you recognize and manage your emotions in different situations: "I'm feeling a little overwhelmed because I have so much to do today, so I'm going to make a list to help me stay organized."
- Point out specific things your child does well to build confidence: "I noticed how creative you were with your drawing today. That's one of your strengths!"
- Help your child see challenges as opportunities for improvement, not failures: "It's okay

that you didn't get the answer right the first time. What do you think you can do differently next time?"

- Teach your child to add "yet" to statements about their abilities to emphasize that improvement is possible. If your child says, "I can't do this," respond with, "You can't do it yet, but with practice, you'll get there."
- Help your child identify specific goals and the steps needed to achieve them. Guide them in setting goals like finishing a book or practicing a sport for 20 minutes a day.

Self-management: The ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. It includes managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself to achieve goals.

Parent tips:

- Teach your child stress-management techniques when he is anxious or afraid. Teach your child to take slow, deep breaths to calm their mind and body when they feel stressed. You can use a visualization, like imagining they're blowing up a balloon or smelling a flower. Another mind-body technique is to guide your child through simple mindfulness exercises, such as focusing on their senses ("What's one thing you can see, hear, and feel right now? Let's focus on those for a minute."). You can also encourage physical activities ("When I feel stressed, moving around really helps. Would you like to go for a walk or play outside?").
- Help develop impulse control in various ways. Here's a few tips: Use the "Pause and think" rule (Encourage them to count to five before reacting in emotionally charged situations. "Before you respond, take a moment to breathe and think about what you want to say."). Establish clear expectations and consequences for impulsive behavior, like interrupting or acting out ("When you feel like interrupting, try raising your hand or waiting until the other person finishes."). Share how you manage your impulses in real-life situations ("I was really tempted to buy something unnecessary today, but I reminded myself to stick to my budget."). Encourage delayed gratification (Learning to wait and prioritize long-term benefits over immediate rewards strengthens self-control.) – for example, show them how saving money for a bigger purchase is more rewarding than spending it immediately ("If you save your allowance for two weeks, you'll have enough to buy that expensive dress you really want.").
- Support goal setting and achievement. For example, help your child set small, specific, and manageable goals ("Let's figure out the steps you need to finish your science project. What's the first thing you need to do?"). Then acknowledge the milestones to keep the child motivated ("You finished the first part of the project, great! What's the next step?"). You can also create, along with your child, visual trackers of progress, like charts, progress board or use progress tracking apps (for example, The Goal and Habbit Tracker Calendar or Habitica).

Learn more here:

- <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=info.intrasoft.habitgoaltracker&pli=1>
- <https://habitica.com/static/home>

Another thing parents can do to enhance goal achievement, which is tied to self-management, is model perseverance - share stories of times you overcame difficulties to reach a goal (I felt like giving up on that big project at work, but I kept trying, and it turned out well. You can do the same!). Help your child see setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow ("It's okay that this didn't work out today. What can you try differently tomorrow?").

Social awareness: The ability to understand and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It involves recognizing social cues and understanding community norms.

Parent tips:

- Show compassion and understanding in your interactions with others, explaining your thought process to your child ("I think Mrs. Johnson was upset today because she was having a hard time. How do you think we can make her feel better?").
- Expose children to diverse perspectives - Choose materials that feature characters from different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. Encourage curiosity about different traditions, foods, and customs (for example, participate in cultural events or cook meals from different cuisines to appreciate diversity)
- Talk about fairness and the harm of stereotypes in age-appropriate ways ("Why do you think it's unfair to say that girls aren't good at sports?")
- Teach children about expected behaviors in various settings, such as school, home, or public places. For example, "When we're in the library, it's polite to speak quietly so we don't disturb others."
- Share tales with ethical dilemmas and discuss the right course of action ("Why do you think the character chose to share their food with the others?"). If reading is not a common habit in your family, you might want to consider creating it or using movies instead.

The following tales can help:

- ✓ To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee - Should Atticus Finch defend an innocent man even if it puts his family at risk and challenges community norms?
- ✓ Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck - Was George right to end Lennie's life to save him from suffering?
- ✓ The Necklace by Guy de Maupassant - Should Mathilde have told the truth about losing the necklace instead of replacing it secretly?
- ✓ Antigone by Sophocles - Should Antigone defy the king's order and bury her brother, knowing she could face death?

Check out these movies also:

- ✓ The Pursuit of Happiness (2006) - How should Chris Gardner balance his personal struggles while providing for his son and maintaining his integrity?

- ✓ Wonder (2017) - How should people treat someone who looks different? Should peer pressure influence how we interact with others?
- ✓ Dead Poets Society (1989) - Should students follow societal expectations or pursue their passions and individuality?
- ✓ Schindler's List (1993) - Should Oskar Schindler risk his wealth and life to save others during the Holocaust?
- ✓ The Blind Side (2009) - Should Leigh Anne Tuohy go against social norms to care for a homeless teenager, Michael Oher?
- ✓ The Social Dilemma (2020) - Should social media platforms prioritize profit over user well-being?

Relationship skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships. It includes effective communication, active listening, and resolving conflicts constructively.

Parent tips:

- Use "I" Statements - demonstrate how to express feelings without blaming others (I feel upset when toys are left on the floor because it makes it hard to walk around.)
- Avoid interrupting, raise concerns calmly, and use polite language. Studies show that children imitate their parents' communication styles (Bandura's Social Learning Theory).
- Teach children to repeat back what they hear to ensure understanding ("So you're saying you felt sad when your friend didn't share their secret with you instead?").
- Put away distractions like phones and make eye contact during conversations, so you can model this behaviour in your teen.
- Get your teen involved in sports, volunteer work, or clubs that require cooperation.
- Assign family projects where everyone contributes, such as planning a vacation or organizing a garage sale.
- Encourage a pause before reacting to conflicts, and guide children through solutions ("Instead of shouting, let's figure out what both of you want and how you can compromise.").
- Talk about the impact of online interactions on relationships ("How do you think posting that comment might make someone feel?").
- Use TV shows or movies to identify good and bad relationship behaviors.

Check out these movies that might help you educate your teen:

- ✓ Inside Out (2015) - How can acknowledging emotions improve relationships? What could Riley have done differently to express herself?
- ✓ Akeelah and the Bee (2006) - How do trust and collaboration help Akeelah succeed? How does her attitude affect her relationships with others?
- ✓ Zootopia (2016) - How can we challenge stereotypes in our relationships? What role does teamwork play in resolving conflicts?
- ✓ Mean Girls (2004) - How does toxic behavior impact friendships? What lessons does Cady learn about respect and kindness?

Responsible decision-making skills: The ability to make ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior. It involves evaluating consequences and considering the well-being of oneself and others.

Parent tips:

- Share your thought process when making decisions to demonstrate how to weigh pros and cons (“I decided to save money this month instead of buying something unnecessary because I want to be prepared for emergencies.”)
- Help teens identify the root of an issue (You’re feeling stressed about your group project. What’s the main challenge—lack of time, poor communication, or something else?”).
- Guide them to think of multiple options and weigh their pros and cons (“If you’re having trouble with a classmate, what could you do? Should you talk to them directly, involve a teacher, or try to work around it? Let’s talk a little bit about each of these options.”).
- Teach teens to consider both immediate and future consequences of their actions (“If you skip studying tonight, you might enjoy time with friends, but how will that affect your test tomorrow?”)
- Share stories of decisions made by others and their consequences (“Remember when your sister skipped the class when she had the last examination in History? How did that impact her grade? Remember how upset she was that she had to miss your cousin’s 18 year old party to study and make up for her mistake?”)
- Discuss values and have conversations about honesty, fairness, and responsibility in decision-making. Remind your teen what are the family values that all the family members try to act on as much as possible.

Conversation example 1:

Parent: “Have you ever had to decide whether or not to tell the truth, even if it was hard?” **Teen:** “Yeah, I told my teacher I forgot my homework, but it wasn’t the whole truth. I didn’t want to admit I just didn’t finish it.”

Parent: “I get that—it can be uncomfortable to admit mistakes. How do you think it felt for you to say that?”

Teen: “It felt better in the moment, but later I felt bad about it.”

Parent: “That’s a common feeling when we aren’t totally honest. Do you think owning up to it next time might help you feel more confident?”

Teen: “I guess so. I could tell her I forgot because I didn’t finish.”

Parent: “That’s a great approach. Being honest, even when it’s tough, builds trust with others and helps you feel proud of yourself.”

Conversation example 2:

Parent: “What do you think fairness means in your group project at school?”

Teen: “That everyone should do their part. But there’s always someone who doesn’t, and

it's frustrating."

Parent: "That does sound frustrating. How do you usually handle it?"

Teen: "I end up doing more of the work to make sure it's done right."

Parent: "That shows responsibility, but it's also important to address fairness. What could you do to help divide the work more equally?"

Teen: "Maybe talk to the group before we start and make sure everyone agrees on what to do."

Parent: "That's a great idea. Fairness means giving everyone an equal chance, and part of that is making sure people know what's expected. How can I help you prepare for that conversation?"

Conversation example 3:

Parent: "Have you ever felt torn between doing what you want and doing what you're supposed to?"

Teen: "Yeah, I wanted to hang out with friends last weekend, but I knew I had a lot of homework. I ended up going out, but I stayed up super late finishing everything."

Parent: "It's tough to balance fun and responsibilities, isn't it? How did staying up late affect you?"

Teen: "I was exhausted the next day, so I didn't really enjoy the time with my friends." **Parent:** "That's a great insight. Responsibility often means thinking ahead to how our choices affect us later. What would you do differently next time?"

Teen: "Maybe finish my homework earlier so I don't have to choose."

Parent: "That's a solid plan. Managing your responsibilities early gives you the freedom to enjoy other things without stress."

Reflection question: Take a couple of minutes to think about the relationship with your child? What can you take from this lesson and implement in the following week or months (no more than 2-3 strategies at a time; change takes time, repetition, and consistency)?

Lesson 3. Managing conflicts with your teen

Managing conflicts with teenagers is a common challenge for parents. Adolescence is marked by significant emotional, cognitive, and social development, which can result in misunderstandings, disagreements, and heightened emotions. However, with evidence-based strategies, parents can navigate conflicts constructively.

Drawing from the work of Rahim and Bonoma (1979), effective conflict management involves balancing concern for oneself with concern for others. Parents can model and teach five conflict-handling styles—integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising—tailored to specific situations.

The conflict management styles:

1. Integrating style (high concern for self and others): This style emphasizes problem-solving, mutual respect, and collaboration to meet the needs of both parties.

Encourage open communication, actively listen, and involve your teen in finding solutions.

- **Scenario:** Your teen wants to go to a late-night concert, but you're concerned about their safety.
- **Response:** "I understand how much you want to go, but I'm worried about you being out late. Let's find a way for you to attend safely—maybe we can arrange for you to go with friends I know and trust or pick you up afterward."

2. Obliging style (low concern for self, high concern for others): This style prioritizes accommodating the other person's needs, fostering goodwill and harmony.

Use this style for minor conflicts or when yielding can build trust.

- **Scenario:** Your teen wants to decorate their room in a way that clashes with your aesthetic preferences.
- **Response:** "I want you to feel comfortable in your space. Go ahead and design it the way you like. We can always repaint it later if needed."

3. Dominating style (high concern for self, low concern for others): This approach enforces rules or decisions, often used when safety or values are non-negotiable.

Use this sparingly and explain your reasoning to maintain trust.

- **Scenario:** Your teen insists on riding in a car with a driver you know has been drinking alcohol in the past.
- **Response:** "I cannot allow you to ride with someone who has been drinking. It's unsafe, and I'll pick you up instead."

4. Avoiding style (low concern for self and others): Avoiding involves deferring the conflict or stepping back temporarily to prevent escalation.

Use this for minor issues or when emotions are too high for constructive discussion.

- **Scenario:** Your teen is angry and shouting about an unfair teacher.
- **Response:** "Let's take a break and talk about this when we're both calmer. I want to hear you out."

5. Compromising style (moderate concern for self and others): Compromising finds middle ground, requiring both parties to make concessions.

Use this style for non-critical conflicts where mutual agreement is possible.

- **Scenario:** Your teen wants to extend their curfew by two hours, but you're only comfortable with one.
- **Response:** "How about we extend your curfew by an hour and reevaluate later based on how it goes?"

Theory is nice, but practice is harder. That's why it is recommended that you practice these styles with people you get along better. Also, pay attention to the following reactions, as a conflict starts or progresses:

- Calm attitude: Use deep breathing or a brief timeout to regulate emotions before addressing the conflict ("I need a minute to collect my thoughts before we talk about this.").
- Avoid put-downs or sarcasm: Instead of saying, "You're being reckless!" try, "Let's figure this out together."
- Use "I" statements (Express your feelings and needs without accusing): "I feel worried when I don't know where you are because I want to make sure you're safe." (instead of "You make me worry about you when you're coming home late at night!")
- Practice active listening: "It sounds to me like you're feeling upset about the fact that you're not allowed to go to that club. Is that right?"
- Express empathy: "I understand it is upsetting not being able to go with your friends to that club. At the same time, it is unsafe for you, since there have been reports that drugs are being consumed there. I want to keep you safe. Is there another place other friends want to go to next Saturday?"

Activity: Think about the past month and identify which conflict resolution style you used most, in interacting with your teen and what were the results. Now that you have learned about 5 different styles, write down what style will probably bring better results for each delicate situation you encountered with your teen.

Lesson 4. How to manage conflicts with siblings

Conflict among siblings and peers is a normal part of growing up, but it provides valuable opportunities for learning critical life skills like empathy, negotiation, and effective communication. This lesson introduces evidence-based strategies to help parents manage and mediate conflicts between siblings and peers, emphasizing the importance of teaching children how to handle disagreements constructively and independently over time. Research shows that children who learn constructive conflict resolution skills have stronger social relationships, higher self-esteem, and better emotional regulation (Craig et al., 2007; Offrey & Rinaldi, 2014).

Sibling and peer conflicts often stem from competition, jealousy, differences in communication styles, or unmet needs. Common triggers of conflict are: sibling rivalry (competition for attention, resources, or perceived fairness), peer dynamic (misunderstandings, differing expectations, or jealousy), developmental differences (younger children may lack impulse control, while older siblings or peers may be more assertive).

The following strategies will likely help you mediate conflicts between your teen and their siblings:

- Establish ground rules for respectful communication and behavior during conflicts ("In our family, we don't call each other names or shout. Let's work together to solve the problem.")

- Establish consequences for the child who does not respect the ground rules of the family ("You hit your brother and that is not acceptable in our family! I am very sorry to say that you can't have the Play Station today. I trust that tomorrow you will act better. What can I do to help you?").
- Reassure the kids that reinforcing consequences does not mean you don't love them anymore ("I'm sorry for you both, no more TV for today, since you could not share it properly and started calling each other names. I love you and I'm doing this to help you learn").
- Focus on fairness rather than favoritism ("I'm not choosing who's right or wrong. Let's figure out how to make this fair for everyone.").
- Encourage children to consider how their actions affect others ("How do you think your sibling felt when you took his phone without asking?").
- Avoid emotional blackmail ("If you keep fighting, it means you don't love me anymore!").

How about preventing conflicts and developing good relationships between siblings?

- Encourage shared activities: Create opportunities for siblings to spend quality time together doing activities they enjoy, such as playing games, working on projects, or going on outings ("Let's bake cookies together as a team—you mix the dough, and your sibling can decorate them."). It helps if you establish such routines since they are in preschool. It's more difficult to start implementing them at teen age.
- Promote teamwork: Assign tasks that require siblings to collaborate, like cleaning their room together or planning a family meal. Collaborative tasks help siblings develop mutual respect and cooperation (Craig et al., 2007).
- Encourage individuality and avoid comparisons: Refrain from comparing siblings, as it can lead to feelings of jealousy or inadequacy. Instead of saying, "Your sister is so neat, why aren't you?" try, "I appreciate how hard you're working to keep your room tidy."
- Highlight each child's strengths: "You're so creative with your artwork, and your sibling is great at building things!"
- Distribute attention equally: Schedule one-on-one time with each child to talk or engage in their favorite activity. Even if teens are not so keen to spend time with their parents, try to find even 30 minutes/week to have a private conversation or activity together.
- Set clear and consistent rules that apply equally to all siblings ("Everyone has to take turns with the TV. Let's use a timer to make it fair."). Avoid being more lenient with younger children and harder on teenagers or vice-versa.

Reflection: Take a moment and reflect on the different ways you have raised your children. During the lesson, have you noticed some things you could do better in the future? Write them down and start thinking of ways to implement them gradually.

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