

Resolving Conflicts Peacefully



Conflict is a natural part of life. As long as people have different needs and opinions, there will be disagreements. Your high schooler will have conflicts with siblings, classmates, friends, teachers, and you. The important thing is learning how to resolve them nonviolently.

This special report provides a step-by-step guide to solving problems peacefully. Give the process a try whenever you and your teen have the usual arguments over grades, homework, friends, chores, etc. The more you practice it at home, the more likely your high schooler will be to use it in other situations. In fact, modeling this process yourself is the best way to ensure your teen will stay safe when handling conflicts. (Editor's Note: The examples below could apply to a boy or a girl.)

1. Look on the bright side.

The next time you're arguing with your teenager, remind yourself—and your teen—that conflict isn't always a bad thing. It gives you a chance to find out how the other person feels about an issue. And if you work together to solve the conflict, your teen will learn an important lesson.

2. Set the stage.

Let's say while your teenager was out, you went into her room, picked up her dirty clothes, and washed them. When she got home, she began yelling, "Why can't you leave my things alone? If I want them on the floor, you have no right to pick them up!"

Instead of defending yourself, suggest a timeout to cool off. You both may need to count to 10, picture a favorite place, spend some time alone, or get some exercise.

When you and your teen are both calmer, find a place to talk privately. If you're at home, it helps if the television, stereo, and computer are turned off.

3. Open the dialogue.

Getting your high schooler to talk about the conflict can be tough. A few encouraging words may help. *Example:* "I see how upset you get when I pick up your dirty clothes. Why don't we sit down and see if we can work something out?"



If your teen doesn't seem interested, say, "I'd like to hear what you think about..." This sends the message that you value her opinions. It may change her mood and make her less defensive.

Continued

Common responses that backfire

Although the approaches below may work for a short time, they don't solve the underlying problem. Think about the following situations. Can you and your teen come up with other positive responses?

Remember: High schoolers learn how to resolve conflicts by watching the adults in their lives. If you handle conflicts physically, chances are your teenager will, too.

Avoidance

Situation: A high school girl is hanging around a college boy. Her mother is worried but doesn't talk about her concerns. Instead, she invents chores to keep her daughter from seeing the boy.

Result: When you avoid dealing with a problem, it doesn't go away. And you miss a chance to share your knowledge and experience.

Better: Mother talks with her daughter about the dangers of being with a boy so much older. Together, they brainstorm and come up with ways the teens can see each other safely.

Continued

High School Years

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Resolving Conflicts Peacefully (continued)

4. Listen to your teenager's opinions.

As your teen talks, listen to find out what's really bothering her. Make eye contact and nod your head occasionally. Try not to interrupt to ask questions. You may be surprised to discover that the real issue isn't what you thought it was.

Suppose your teen says, "I don't like you snooping around when I'm not home. You're invading my privacy." Once she's finished, repeat what she said in your own words. *Example:* "So, you don't like me going into your room when you're not home." Then she'll know you heard—and respect—her feelings on the issue.

5. Explain your side.

As you begin to share your thoughts, be sure not to blame your high schooler. If you do, she won't be open to anything you say.

Blaming: "You're so lazy. Why don't you pick up your own dirty clothes? Then I won't have to go into your room."

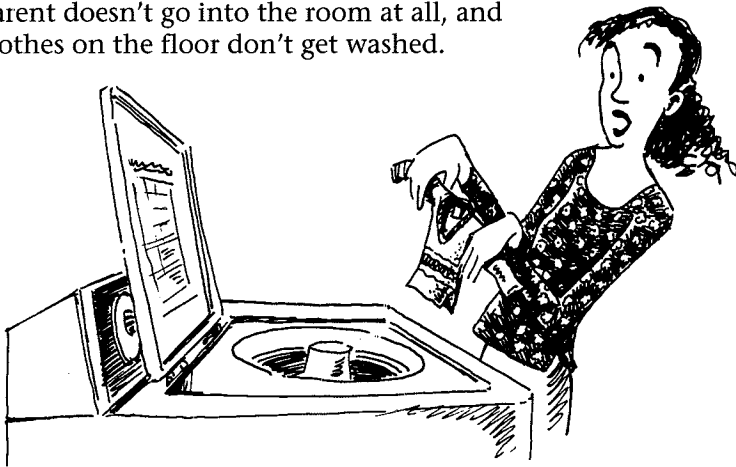
Better: "I went into your room to collect your dirty clothes to wash them. I didn't even look at your things."

6. Brainstorm solutions.

Work together to come up with a win-win solution. Write down any ideas and consider all possibilities.

Options that could resolve this situation might include:

- Not changing anything. The teen keeps leaving the clothes on the floor. The parent continues to pick them up.
- Teen puts the clothes in the hamper. Parent washes them.
- Teen agrees to do her own laundry.
- Parent doesn't go into the room at all, and clothes on the floor don't get washed.



7. Give it a try.

Once you list the options, talk about them. Select one and try it for a set period of time. Agree to talk again and see if the solution is working.

If your agreement isn't working out the way you both thought it would, talk about it. If necessary, brainstorm again.

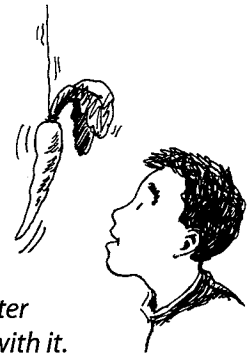
This conflict resolution process may not work perfectly, but your teenager will give you plenty of chances to practice. As you tackle tough issues, it's important to remind your teen regularly that you love her.

Common responses that backfire

(continued)

Bargaining

Situation: A high school boy quits practicing his trumpet mid-year. His parents offer to buy him new computer software if he sticks with it.



Result: When you bargain, you're simply bribing your teenager to get your way. This only works for a little while, since the real issue is never faced.

Better: Parents ask their son why he isn't practicing. (Maybe he wants to switch instruments or doesn't want to play in the band at all.) They share their thoughts on why he should continue to play.

I win/you lose

Situation: A high schooler wants to play basketball. His dad prefers football. Dad never asks why his son wants to join the basketball team. Instead, he taunts and pushes until the boy gives in and plays football.

Result: By ignoring your teen's opinion, you may damage your relationship.

Better: Dad asks his son to explain why he prefers basketball. Son listens to Dad's opinion about football. They work together to find the best solution.



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Resources for Educators, Inc.
3035 Valley Avenue, Suite 103 • Winchester, VA 22601
(540) 723-0322

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