# **Conflict management with teenagers**

Now that your children are older, you might find you clash more often. It’s normal for you to disagree, but it’s also important to find ways of dealing with conflict. And when you use conflict management strategies yourself, you can help your children learn these important life skills too.

### **Conflict management skills: why you need them**

During the teenage years, you might clash with your children more often than you did in the past. For example, you might disagree about things like what your children wear, what they do with their time, or whether they follow your cultural traditions.

Some conflict is normal and healthy, as your children become independent and responsible young adults. Also, you and your children are individuals with different opinions and views, so you can expect to disagree sometimes.

But too much conflict isn’t a good thing, so you need conflict management strategies and skills.

Dealing with conflict with your children can help to reduce family stress levels. It can also make your relationship with your children stronger. And if you deal with conflict in effective ways, you help your children learn some important life skills.

It’s worth picking your battles. Conflict can often be about small things. So even if you dislike your children’s dyed hair, think about whether it’s really worth arguing about. You might want to save your energy for important things like safety.

### **Getting ready to deal with conflict: tips**

These tips can help you get ready to deal with conflict with your children:

* Try to think back to your feelings and experiences as a young person. This can help you relate to your children.
* Remember that [teenage brain development](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain_development_teenagers.html) means your children might not be able to see the risks and consequences of a situation. Your children might not be able to see things from your perspective either.
* Try to be flexible about little issues. This might mean your children are more willing to listen and discuss bigger issues.
* Go easy on yourself and don’t expect to be perfect – you’re human too. If you overreact or lose your self-control a bit, just say sorry and start again when you can.
* Avoid dealing with conflict when you and your children are feeling upset or angry. Wait until you feel calm instead.
* Prepare what you’re going to say, and think about the words you want to use.
* Try to make sure that not every conversation with your children is about difficult issues. Spend some time enjoying each other’s company if you can.

### **Talking through conflict: tips**

* Stay calm, stop what you’re doing, make eye contact, listen, and treat your children with respect.
* Let your children have their say. Be open to hearing your child’s point of view. When they have finished, you can talk.
* Be open about your feelings. This can help your children understand why you want them to do or not do something. For example, ‘I feel worried about your safety when I don’t know where you are’, or ‘I feel that it’s important for our family to celebrate some of our cultural traditions’.
* Explain your view simply and briefly, making it clear that your main concern is for your children’s wellbeing, now and in the future. For example, ‘I need to make sure you’re safe if you’re out at night. It helps if you tell me where you’re going and who you’re with’.
* If you can, be prepared to [negotiate with your child](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/negotiating_teenagers.html)ren and compromise. When you compromise, you demonstrate [problem-solving skills](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/problem_solving_teenagers.html). For example, your children might want to paint their bedroom black, and you hate the idea. A compromise might be painting one wall black or two walls in a dark colour.
* If you have to say ‘no’, try to do it in a calm, understanding and respectful way. For example, ‘I understand that you want a tattoo. But you’re 13 and you’ve got a lot of time to think about it. So right now, the answer is no’.

### **Dealing with conflict aftermath: tips**

Despite your best efforts, it might take a while for you and your children to calm down after a conflict. Also, your children might feel really disappointed if you’ve said no to something. These tips can help you both feel better and move forward.

* Help your children to calm down by showing your understanding, letting them express their disappointment, or giving them space if they need it.
* Look after yourself – talking to someone you trust can help you feel better about the situation.

### **When your children avoids conflict**

Your children might try to avoid conflict by doing things ‘behind your back’ or lying to you.

If you want an open and honest relationship where you and your children can talk about tough topics, you need to be ready to manage your own feelings and reactions when you hear something you don’t like. It can help to [plan for difficult conversations](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/tricky_conversations.html) about things like broken curfews, alcohol and other drug use, cyberbullying and so on.

### **Handling anger in conflict management**

As part of conflict management with teenagers, you might need to be ready to deal with anger from your children.

It might help to know that teenagers are still learning how to express feelings and views. Your children might feel they need to express their views very strongly for them to be heard. Teenagers are also learning how to handle strong feelings.

So if your children gets angry or uses an angry tone with you, here are some things that can help:

* Stay calm.
* Take a break to let things calm down, if staying calm is hard.
* Let your children know you’re listening.
* Show your children that you care about their thoughts and feelings.
* Try to stick to the issue you’re in conflict about, rather than getting onto past events or other issues.

After you’ve heard what your children has to say and you’ve shown understanding, you can try these steps:

* Take your time to express your feelings, thoughts and wishes as best you can.
* Keep it simple and short – this can encourage your children to listen.
* Try to negotiate a decision that you can both live with, or at least try to be clear about why you can’t agree.

If your children are angry at you about something you did that hurt them, show that you understand how it affected them, say you’re sorry, and then try to ensure the same thing doesn’t happen again.

If you [feel angry](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/anger_management.html), take some time to pin down what the feeling is about – even if you’re in the middle of a conversation with your children. You might even need to take a break so you can work out how you’re going to deal with your feelings. This isn’t always easy and takes practice, so be kind to yourself and your children as you learn better ways of dealing with conflict.

### **Handling violence**

There is a difference between conflict and violence. Conflict, disagreement and some anger are OK – but violence is not OK.

Teenagers are still learning about what’s OK and what isn’t. They might still be learning where the line is between conflict and violence – for example, in [fights with siblings](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/sibling_fighting_teenagers.html). You can help with this.

But if your children are damaging property, yelling or swearing excessively, hitting or making threats to harm something or someone, you need to set clear boundaries. It’s important to show them that they have crossed the line and their behaviour isn’t acceptable.

If your children is showing early signs of violent behaviour, it can help to:

* give them a clear message that the behaviour is not OK
* tell them that you won’t speak with them while they are not in that state
* let them know that you’re willing to talk to them and work things out together when they have calmed down
* let them know that that there will be consequences for the behaviour
* make sure your own behaviour is respectful, and that you’re managing your own emotions and modelling self-control.

If your children have experienced violence from another adult or child, they might need professional help to feel safe, to deal with what they have experienced, and to learn new ways to behave. If you find it hard to control your own anger or violence, you might also find professional help useful. A school counsellor or family relationships counsellor might be good places to start.

Source: <http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/conflict_management_teenagers.html/context/1096>