

The parent-teen relationship: Phrases to use in conflict resolution

Resolving an argument with a friend, spouse or coworker is hard enough. But how about when it's with your teenager?

The idea doesn't have to be daunting, says Sara Bennett, a psychotherapist at OSF HealthCare. In fact, good conflict resolution skills are critical to being a good parent.

Earlier on the OSF HealthCare Newsroom, Bennett outlined strategies to resolve and repair things with your child. Now, she has some helpful phrases and body language that parents can commit to memory and break out during the tough conversations.

- When you need to deescalate:
 - "You're not in trouble. We are figuring this out."
 - "Your feelings make sense."
 - "This is hard. Let's slow this down a little."
 - "Can you take a walk with me for a minute?"
 - "Let's pause for a minute. I'm right here with you."
- When parents feel overwhelmed:
 - "I want to hear what you have to say. I need a minute to calm myself."
- During a conflict:
 - "Let's do a reset so we can hear each other."
 - "We're both getting upset. Let's pause for a minute."
 - "I care about you way more than being right."
- When your child is shutting down:
 - "I'm still here whenever you're ready."
- To show curiosity and validate their emotions:
 - "I want to understand what's happening."
 - "Here's what was happening for me in that moment."
 - "When I saw _____, I was really worried for you."
 - "What might be the difficulty here?"
 - "Is there something that would make this feel better?"
 - "What keeps you from doing _____?"
 - "I can understand why that would be so hard. I can understand why you felt that way."
 - "I think most anyone in that situation would feel something similar."

- "Thank you for being so honest. I know it was not easy."
- For parents to take accountability:
 - "I'm sorry for my part in this. I'm sorry I yelled and walked away. I reacted too quickly."
 - "That wasn't fair. You didn't deserve that."
- Problem solving:
 - "What do you think you need to do better?"
 - "I like that idea. Would you be open to hearing another possibility?"
 - "What kind of support do you need from me?"
 - "I'm not sure I agree. I'd like to see _____. Do you have thoughts on that?"
- After a tough conversation:
 - "That was hard. I'm still with you."
 - "I didn't say that very well. I'm sorry. Can we try again?"
 - "Can we talk about what happened earlier?"
 - "I don't want to argue. I just want us to understand each other."
 - "To be clear, we both agree to _____. Do you have thoughts on that?"
 - "I'm so glad we were able to get through this. I knew we could do it."
 - "I'm glad you were able to hang in there with me. I know it wasn't easy."
- Body language and other tips for parents:
 - Slow breathing
 - Relaxed posture
 - Sit near the child
 - Soften your tone
 - Lower your volume
 - Slow your cadence
 - Allow time for short breaks. You could take a walk together or separately or play some music.
 - Acknowledge the conflict is difficult, but offer hope. Remind the child of their strengths and successes.

Learn more

Read more about [mental health resources](#) available at OSF that can help build good family dynamics. Some resources, like [behavioral health navigators](#) and [support groups](#) at hospitals like the one Bennett works at, are available even if you are not an OSF patient.