

Turning Conflict into Connection:

A Parent's Guide to strategies for a tough conversation

Families thrive on connection, understanding, and mutual respect. When an adolescent in the household struggles with aggression, hostility, or disruptive behavior, the entire family feels the strain. These challenges can create a ripple effect, impacting relationships, emotional safety, and the overall dynamics of the home. Open, constructive conversations can serve as a powerful tool for addressing these issues and fostering healthier connections.

For younger siblings, speaking up about their feelings and needs can be intimidating, but it's a crucial step toward creating a household where everyone feels heard and valued. These conversations not only provide a safe space for the younger sibling to express themselves but also give the adolescent a chance to reflect on how their actions affect others. This process encourages empathy, accountability, and the development of healthier patterns of interaction.

When families take the time to address conflict with care and intention, they create an environment where everyone can grow and thrive. By giving each member a voice, the family strengthens its foundation, ensuring that even the toughest challenges can be met with compassion, collaboration, and a commitment to positive change. This guide is designed to help families navigate these critical conversations, turning moments of tension into opportunities for connection and understanding.

If a teen refuses to engage in a conversation about their behavior, emotions, or conflict within the family, it can be frustrating and challenging for both the teen and the parents or siblings. However, it's important to approach this situation with understanding and patience, recognizing that refusal to engage often stems from deeper feelings or fears. Here's what might be happening and how to approach it:

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Fear of being Judged:

Teens often worry they'll be criticized or misunderstood, especially about sensitive topics like friendships, academics, or emotions.

Create a Judgment-Free Zone

- **What to say:** "Whatever you're feeling is okay. I want to understand what's going on for you."
- **Why it works:** Teens need reassurance that their emotions are valid and won't be met with criticism. Show understanding by listening without interrupting or reacting harshly.
- **Example:** If your teen admits they've failed a test, respond calmly: "Thanks for telling me. Let's talk about how we can handle this together."

Acknowledge Their Bravery

- **What to say:** "I know it's hard to talk about this. I really appreciate you trusting me enough to share."
- **Why it works:** Recognizing their courage in opening up can make them feel valued and less vulnerable.
- **Example:** If they share something deeply personal, like trouble with a friend, thank them for confiding in you before offering advice.

Share Your Own Imperfections

- **What to say:** "When I was your age, I felt the same way sometimes. I remember being so nervous about..."
- **Why it works:** Sharing relatable stories helps teens see you as someone who understands, rather than someone who's perfect or critical.
- **Example:** If they're embarrassed about making a mistake, tell them about a time you handled a similar situation and what you learned.

Feeling Overwhelmed:

Sometimes teens shut down because they're trying to process too many emotions or tasks at once.

Break the Problem into Smaller Pieces

- **What to say:** "Let's not worry about everything all at once. What's one thing we can focus on right now?"
- **Why it works:** Tackling smaller parts makes big challenges feel manageable.
- **Example:** If they're overwhelmed by homework, help them prioritize one subject or assignment rather than the entire workload.

Offer Emotional Support Before Problem-Solving

- **What to say:** "I can see this is really stressful for you. Let's take a few deep breaths together."
- **Why it works:** Helping them calm down first allows their brain to shift from "fight or flight" to problem-solving mode.
- **Example:** Sit with them quietly for a few minutes, offering a calming activity like doodling or sipping tea, before returning to the issue.

Help Them Set Boundaries

- **What to say:** "It's okay to say no to things if you're feeling stretched too thin."
- **Why it works:** Teens often feel pressured to meet everyone's expectations, leading to emotional overload.
- **Example:** If they're overwhelmed by extracurricular activities, work together to decide what commitments can be paused or scaled back.

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Distrust in Past Outcomes:

When conversations or efforts in the past haven't gone well, teens may feel there's no point in trying again.

Own Past Mistakes

- **What to say:** "I realize I didn't handle this well before, and I want to do better this time."
- **Why it works:** Taking responsibility for your role shows humility and a willingness to change.
- **Example:** If previous talks ended in arguments, acknowledge it and propose a fresh start: "Last time we talked about this, I got frustrated. I'm sorry about that."

Show Them It's Different Now

- **What to say:** "This time, I want to focus on what you need, not just what I think."
- **Why it works:** Teens need to feel their input is valued.
- **Example:** Instead of giving advice right away, ask: "What would be helpful for you right now?"

Build Trust Gradually

- **What to say:** "I know it'll take time for us to figure this out, but I'm here for you."
- **Why it works:** Showing patience reassures them that you're committed to improving your relationship.
- **Example:** Keep the conversation light and casual at first, like talking during a walk, to create a low-pressure environment.

Embarrassment:

Teens may feel self-conscious about their thoughts, feelings, or actions, especially if they think they'll be laughed at.

Respect Their Privacy

- **What to say:** "I'm here to talk if you're ready, and we can keep it just between us."
- **Why it works:** Knowing their thoughts will remain private encourages openness.
- **Example:** Avoid discussing sensitive topics in front of siblings or others.

Normalize Their Feelings

- **What to say:** "Feeling embarrassed is totally normal. Everyone feels that way sometimes."
- **Why it works:** When teens see their emotions as universal, they feel less isolated.
 - **Example:** If they're embarrassed about a social mistake, share how you handled an awkward situation in the past.

Praise Their Effort

- **What to say:** "I'm really proud of you for trying, even though this feels hard."
- **Why it works:** Positive reinforcement builds confidence.
- **Example:** If they struggle with a school presentation, focus on their preparation rather than the outcome.

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Perceived Unfairness

Teens often feel they're being treated unfairly or that rules aren't applied equally.

Validate Their Perspective

- **What to say:** "I see why this feels unfair to you. Let's talk about it."
- **Why it works:** Validation helps teens feel heard, even if you don't fully agree.
- **Example:** If they feel a sibling gets special treatment, ask: "Can you tell me more about why it feels that way?"

Explain the Reasoning

- **What to say:** "I made this decision because... but I understand it may feel different to you."
- **Why it works:** Clear communication reduces feelings of arbitrariness.
- **Example:** If they're upset about a curfew, explain the safety concerns behind it.

Collaborate on Solutions

- **What to say:** "How do you think we can make this feel more fair?"
- **Why it works:** Involving them in problem-solving increases their buy-in.
- **Example:** Work together to create house rules everyone agrees on.

Feeling Forced or Controlled

Teens may resist engaging if they feel coerced into the conversation or pressured to meet adult expectations.

Invite, Don't Demand

- **What to say:** "I'd like to hear your thoughts when you're ready. This is important to me because I care about you."
- **Why it works:** Giving them agency reduces defensiveness and allows them to feel in control of their participation.
- **Example:** Instead of saying, "We need to talk right now," offer a choice: "Do you want to chat now, or would another time work better for you?"

Use Collaborative Language

- **What to say:** "This isn't about me telling you what to do. It's about us figuring things out together."
- **Why it works:** Collaboration signals that their voice matters and the focus is on teamwork.
- **Example:** If discussing curfews, emphasize, "Let's find a time that works for both of us and keeps you safe."

Focus on the Positive Outcomes

- **What to say:** "Talking about this could help us avoid more misunderstandings. What's something you'd like to see improve?"
- **Why it works:** Teens are more likely to engage when they see the potential for benefits or improvements.
- **Example:** Highlight how discussing chores could lead to less nagging and more free time for everyone.

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Fear of Consequences

Teens might avoid conversations if they believe they'll face punishment or disappointment.

Reassure Them It's Safe to Be Honest

- **What to say:** "This isn't about getting you in trouble. It's about understanding what's going on and working through it."
- **Why it works:** Removing the fear of punishment encourages open dialogue.
- **Example:** If they admit to missing a homework assignment, focus on problem-solving: "How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?"

Avoid Reacting with Anger

- **What to say:** "I might feel upset, but I promise to listen first before I react."
- **Why it works:** Teens are less likely to shut down if they know their honesty won't immediately lead to a negative reaction.
- **Example:** If they confess to breaking a rule, stay calm and say, "Thank you for telling me. Let's figure out what happens next."

Emphasize Growth Over Mistakes

- **What to say:** "We all mess up sometimes. What's important is learning from it."
- **Why it works:** A focus on growth makes them feel less judged for past actions.
- **Example:** If they did poorly on a test, ask, "What can we do differently next time to help you prepare?"

Lack of Trust in the Adult

Teens may not engage if they feel the adult has broken their trust before.

Acknowledge the Breach of Trust

- **What to say:** "I know I didn't handle things well before, and I want to work on rebuilding our trust."
- **Why it works:** Admitting fault demonstrates accountability and a willingness to improve.
- **Example:** If you broke a promise, say, "I'm sorry I let you down. I'll do my best to keep my word in the future."

Be Consistent in Your Actions

- **What to do:** Follow through on commitments and respect their boundaries to rebuild trust over time.
- **Why it works:** Teens need to see reliability in actions, not just hear promises.
- **Example:** If you promise not to share what they tell you, keep it private unless safety is at risk.

Ask What They Need to Feel Safe

- **What to say:** "What can I do to make it easier for you to trust me again?"
- **Why it works:** Giving them a say in the process empowers them to express their needs.
- **Example:** If they ask for more privacy, agree to respect their boundaries while setting clear guidelines.

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Difficulty Expressing Feelings

Teens may not have the words to explain what they're feeling or may feel awkward doing so.

Offer Tools for Expression

- **What to do:** Provide journals, art supplies, or mood charts to help them communicate nonverbally.
- **Why it works:** Alternative methods reduce the pressure of verbal expression.
- **Example:** Ask them to circle emotions on a chart or draw how they feel before starting the conversation.

Model Emotional Language

- **What to say:** "When I feel frustrated, I sometimes take a walk to clear my head. What helps you when you feel that way?"
- **Why it works:** Modeling emotional vocabulary teaches them how to identify and articulate their own feelings.
- **Example:** If they seem upset, gently suggest: "It looks like something might be bothering you. Do you feel sad, frustrated, or something else?"

Give Them Time

- **What to say:** "It's okay if you're not sure how to explain it right now. We can talk later when you're ready."
- **Why it works:** Giving space reduces pressure and allows them to process their emotions.
- **Example:** Leave the door open for future conversations: "I'll be here whenever you're ready to talk."

Resentment or Anger Toward the Adult

Teens may refuse to engage because they're upset with the adult, whether due to a recent conflict or long-standing frustrations.

Acknowledge Their Feelings Without Defensiveness

- **What to say:** "I can tell you're feeling upset with me. I want to understand why."
- **Why it works:** Validating their emotions shows empathy and a willingness to listen.
- **Example:** If they accuse you of being unfair, ask, "What feels unfair to you? Let's talk about it."

Apologize if Necessary

- **What to say:** "I realize I made a mistake, and I'm sorry for how that affected you."
- **Why it works:** A sincere apology can defuse tension and rebuild connection.
- **Example:** If you overreacted during a previous conversation, admit it: "I was too harsh earlier. I'll try to handle things differently next time."

Reframe the Conversation as Collaborative

- **What to say:** "We're on the same team, and I want to work through this together."
- **Why it works:** Teens need to feel that you're allies, not adversaries.
- **Example:** If they're angry about discipline, say, "Let's talk about what's working and what's not so we can find a better approach."

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15 Ways Teens Might React During These Conversations

Silent Treatment

Example in conversation: You ask your teen, "How was school today?" and they shrug, look away, and stay quiet.

Response 1: Stay calm and avoid pressuring them

- What to say: "It's okay to be quiet. I'm here when you're ready to talk."
- Why: This response shows patience and creates a safe space, reducing pressure. It reassures them that you value their readiness to engage.

Response 2: Validate their discomfort

- What to say: "I can see this is hard for you. We can take it slow."
- Why: Validation acknowledges their feelings without pushing, showing understanding and acceptance.

Response 3: Offer another method

- What to say: "If talking feels too hard, maybe you could write it down or text me."
- Why: Providing alternatives to verbal communication can help teens feel less overwhelmed, opening the door to engagement.

Eye Rolling or Sarcasm

Example in conversation: You say, "Let's talk about your grades," and they respond with, "Oh, sure, because that's all that matters, right?"

Response 1: Ignore the behavior and focus on the topic

- What to say: "I see you're frustrated. Can you tell me more about why?"
- Why: Ignoring the behavior minimizes power struggles, while focusing on the root issue allows for deeper discussion.

Response 2: Stay calm

- What to say: "It's okay to feel annoyed, but I'd like to hear what you're really feeling."
- Why: Remaining calm models emotional regulation and signals that their emotions are valid but manageable.

Response 3: Redirect

- What to say: "This is important, and I want to get to the heart of it with you."
- Why: Redirecting reminds them of the purpose of the conversation and shifts focus from sarcasm to meaningful dialogue.

Raising Their Voice

Example in conversation: You say, "You're grounded for the weekend," and they shout, "That's not fair! You never listen to me!"

Response 1: Lower your tone

- What to say: "I can hear that you're upset. Let's try to keep this calm so we can work through it."
- Why: A calm tone can de-escalate heightened emotions and model constructive conflict resolution.

Response 2: Acknowledge their emotion

- What to say: "I get that you're angry, and it's okay to feel that way. Let's talk about it."
- Why: Validating their anger shows you're not dismissing their feelings, creating an opportunity for discussion.

Response 3: Suggest a break

- What to say: "Let's take a few minutes and come back to this."
- Why: A break helps regulate emotions, preventing further escalation while showing respect for their emotional needs.

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15 Ways Teens Might React During These Conversations

Walking Away

Example in conversation: When you bring up a chore they didn't complete, they stand up and leave the room.

Response 1: Give space but set expectations

- What to say: "I'll give you some time, but we do need to talk about this later."
- Why: Allowing space shows respect for their autonomy while maintaining accountability.

Response 2: Reassure them

- What to say: "I'm not mad. I just want to understand where you're coming from."
- Why: Reassurance reduces defensiveness and keeps the lines of communication open.

Response 3: Follow up later

- What to say: "Can we try again when you feel ready?"
- Why: Revisiting the conversation at a calmer time shows commitment to resolving issues without forcing them.

Crying

Example in conversation: You mention a sensitive topic, and they begin to cry quietly.

Response 1: Offer comfort

- What to say: "I see this is really hard for you. Take your time."
- Why: Comfort creates a safe space for them to process emotions without fear of judgment.

Response 2: Validate their feelings

- What to say: "It's okay to cry. This is a safe space."
- Why: Validation reinforces emotional safety, allowing them to express themselves freely.

Response 3: Provide support

- What to say: "Do you want a hug or some space before we continue?"
- Why: Offering options respects their needs and supports emotional regulation.

Shutting Down Emotionally

Example in conversation: You ask a question, and they stare blankly at the floor without responding.

Response 1: Show empathy

- What to say: "You seem overwhelmed. Let's pause for a bit."
- Why: Empathy signals understanding and reduces emotional pressure.

Response 2: Gently encourage

- What to say: "I'm here when you're ready. Take your time."
- Why: Gentle encouragement helps them feel supported without pushing too hard.

Response 3: Reframe

- What to say: "We don't have to solve everything today. Let's start small."
- Why: Reframing reduces the scope of the conversation, making it more manageable.

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15 Ways Teens Might React During These Conversations

Defiant Statements

Example in conversation: You ask, "Can you clean your room?" and they respond, "I don't have to do anything you say."

Response 1: Stay calm and firm

- What to say: "I hear you're upset, but I've asked you to clean your room. Let's talk after it's done."
- Why: This response models setting boundaries without escalating the conflict, emphasizing the importance of following through with responsibilities.

Response 2: Offer choices

- What to say: "You can clean your room now or in 30 minutes, but it needs to be done today."
- Why: Offering choices gives your teen a sense of control over their actions while still maintaining the request.

Response 3: Avoid power struggles

- What to say: "I'm not looking to argue about this, but it's part of what needs to be done. Let me know when you're ready."
- Why: This approach prevents escalation by removing the opportunity for further defiance, while reinforcing the expectation.

Mocking or Disrespecting

Example in conversation: You tell your teen to stop talking back, and they mimic your words sarcastically.

Response 1: Address the behavior directly

- What to say: "That tone isn't respectful, and we need to speak to each other kindly."
- Why: This response addresses the behavior directly, setting clear expectations for how to communicate respectfully.

Response 2: Set a consequence for disrespect

- What to say: "If you continue to speak that way, we'll need to take a break from this conversation."
- Why: By linking consequences to disrespect, it encourages them to consider their behavior and its impact.

Response 3: Model respectful communication

- What to say: "I understand that you're upset, but let's talk about it calmly."
- Why: Modeling calm and respectful communication shows your teen how to handle conflicts maturely.

Whining or Complaining

Example in conversation: You ask your teen to do the dishes, and they respond, "Ugh, I don't want to do it. It's always me!"

Response 1: Acknowledge the frustration, then redirect

- What to say: "I understand you don't like doing the dishes, but it's part of what we all do to help out."
- Why: Acknowledging the frustration before redirecting helps your teen feel heard while reinforcing the responsibility.

Response 2: Set clear expectations

- What to say: "This is your task for today. If you don't want to do it, we can discuss another way to share the chores."
- Why: Setting clear expectations helps prevent future misunderstandings and reinforces accountability.

Response 3: Avoid enabling the complaint

- What to say: "Complaining won't change the situation. Let's focus on getting it done."
- Why: This response prevents reinforcing whining and encourages your teen to take action instead of getting stuck in negativity.

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15 Ways Teens Might React During These Conversations

Deflecting Responsibility

Example in conversation: When you ask why they didn't do their homework, they say, "It's not my fault. The teacher didn't explain it well."

Response 1: Gently shift focus to their role

- What to say: "I understand the teacher might not have been clear, but you still need to do your part. How can we approach this together?"
- Why: This response gently shifts the conversation toward their responsibility while offering support, rather than making them feel blamed.

Response 2: Encourage problem-solving

- What to say: "Let's figure out how you can get help in the future so this doesn't happen again."
- Why: Encouraging problem-solving empowers your teen to take responsibility for future actions and fosters independence.

Response 3: Set boundaries around excuses

- What to say: "We can't control how others act, but we can control how we respond. Let's work on finding a solution together."
- Why: This reinforces the idea of personal responsibility and avoids allowing deflection to take over the conversation.

Arguing or Debating

Example in conversation: You ask them to clean their room, and they respond by trying to debate the fairness of the task.

Response 1: Stick to your decision

- What to say: "We're not going to debate this right now. The room needs to be cleaned."
- Why: Staying firm helps set boundaries and prevent endless debates, signaling that some things are non-negotiable.

Response 2: End the conversation if it escalates

- What to say: "We're not getting anywhere with this argument. We'll talk about it when we're both calm."
- Why: Ending the argument allows emotions to cool down and sets a boundary against unnecessary conflict.

Response 3: Validate feelings, then redirect

- What to say: "I know you feel this is unfair, but we still need to follow through. Let's talk about your feelings afterward."
- Why: Validating emotions reduces resistance, while redirecting back to the task helps maintain focus on responsibilities.

Refusing to Engage

Example in conversation: Your teen doesn't respond to a question and continues to ignore you when asked to help with something.

Response 1: Be patient, but set limits

- What to say: "I understand you might need some time. But we need to have this conversation eventually."
- Why: Giving space respects their needs but still emphasizes the importance of addressing the issue.

Response 2: Reinforce the importance of communication

- What to say: "I need to hear from you so we can work this out. I'm here when you're ready to talk."
- Why: This encourages engagement by reinforcing that their participation is important for resolution.

Response 3: Offer a structured break

- What to say: "It seems like now might not be the best time to talk. Let's take a break and come back to this in 10 minutes."
- Why: A structured break provides space for emotions to settle and increases the chances of a productive conversation afterward.

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Parent's guide to strategies for tough conversations 15 Ways Teens Might React During These Conversations

Making Excuses

Example in conversation: Your teen says, "I couldn't do it because I was too tired" or "I forgot because I had too much on my plate."

Response 1: Acknowledge their struggles, but encourage accountability

- What to say: "I understand you've had a lot on your mind, but we need to find a way to handle everything. Let's work on it together."
- Why: This balances empathy with responsibility, helping them see that while their struggles are valid, they still need to take ownership.

Response 2: Encourage time management skills

- What to say: "How can we organize your schedule to avoid this happening again?"
- Why: Encouraging proactive solutions helps teens develop life skills and reinforces responsibility for their actions.

Response 3: Redirect to problem-solving

- What to say: "Excuses don't change what needs to be done. Let's figure out a way to get this done."
- Why: This reinforces that excuses won't lead to progress, motivating them to focus on finding solutions.

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Caregiver suggestions

Suggestions for "When you..."

- When you yell at me.
- When you slam doors.
- When you refuse to talk to me.
- When you roll your eyes.
- When you ignore house rules.
- When you break something out of anger.
- When you insult your siblings.
- When you argue with everything I say.
- When you lie to me.
- When you refuse to take responsibility.
- When you call me names.
- When you isolate yourself in your room.
- When you use disrespectful language.
- When you act impulsively without considering consequences.
- When you threaten others.
- When you shut down and refuse to participate in family activities.
- When you avoid schoolwork or chores.
- When you turn to aggressive behaviors instead of talking.
- When you disrespect my boundaries as your parent.
- When you make others in the household feel unsafe.

Suggestions for "...and _____ happens"

- And the house feels tense.
- And I worry about your future.
- And it feels like I can't reach you.
- And your siblings feel scared or hurt.
- And I feel disrespected.
- And it disrupts the peace in our home.
- And everyone walks on eggshells.
- And we lose valuable time together.
- And it feels like we're on different teams.
- And you don't get what you need.
- And I question my parenting.
- And it becomes harder to support you.
- And trust erodes between us.
- And your words stay with me.
- And I feel emotionally exhausted.
- And it feels like there's no progress.
- And our relationship feels strained.
- And I feel helpless to guide you.
- And others may judge or misunderstand our family.
- And it delays solutions to the problem.

Suggestions for "I feel..."

- I feel hurt.
- I feel scared.
- I feel exhausted.
- I feel helpless.
- I feel like I'm failing you.
- I feel anxious about what's next.
- I feel disrespected.
- I feel shut out.
- I feel like my efforts don't matter.
- I feel overwhelmed.
- I feel like I'm walking on eggshells.
- I feel heartbroken.
- I feel underappreciated.
- I feel confused about how to help.
- I feel like we're losing our bond.
- I feel torn between discipline and understanding.
- I feel sad for you.
- I feel angry.
- I feel emotionally drained.
- I feel desperate for things to get better.

Suggestions for "I need..."

- I need you to talk to me calmly.
- I need us to find a solution together.
- I need you to respect our family rules.
- I need time to process what happened.
- I need you to understand how your actions affect me.
- I need us to rebuild trust.
- I need us to take a break and revisit this later.
- I need to feel safe in my own home.
- I need you to take responsibility for your actions.
- I need you to express your feelings in healthier ways.
- I need you to work on calming down before talking.
- I need you to help repair the relationships you've hurt.
- I need you to understand that aggression isn't the answer.
- I need us to spend time together without conflict.
- I need you to tell me what's really going on inside.
- I need you to trust me to help you.
- I need support from other professionals for both of us.
- I need boundaries to be respected.
- I need you to listen to my perspective too.
- I need us to focus on teamwork as a family.

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Sibling Suggestions

Suggestions for "When you..."

- When you tease me in front of your friends.
- When you call me names.
- When you take my things without asking.
- When you tell me to go away.
- When you ignore me when I need help.
- When you make fun of my interests.
- When you blame me for something I didn't do.
- When you interrupt me while I'm talking.
- When you tell me I'm annoying.
- When you act like my feelings don't matter.
- When you push me out of your room.
- When you don't share things we're supposed to share.
- When you laugh at me when I make a mistake.
- When you roll your eyes at me.
- When you don't listen to me.
- When you break a promise to spend time with me.
- When you act like I'm not good enough to be around you.
- When you make me feel left out.
- When you tell me to stop trying to talk to you.
- When you treat me like I'm just a little kid.
- When you scare me by yelling or throwing things.
- When you don't give me a chance to explain myself.
- When you try to boss me around like a parent.
- When you act like you don't care if I'm upset.
- When you hit or push me.

Suggestions for "...and _____ happens"

- And I feel like I'm not important to you.
- And I don't feel safe around you.
- And it's hard for me to trust you.
- And I feel like I can't count on you.
- And I feel like you're always mad at me.
- And I feel like I have to hide my feelings from you.
- And I feel like you don't care about how I feel.
- And it makes me want to avoid you.
- And I feel like I don't matter to you.
- And I start to feel like there's no point in trying.
- And I don't feel comfortable being myself around you.
- And I feel like I'm always the problem.
- And I don't feel like we're on the same team.
- And I feel like I'm walking on eggshells around you.
- And I feel scared to speak up.
- And I feel like I can't do anything right in your eyes.
- And I feel like I have to be perfect for you to like me.
- And I feel like we're drifting apart.
- And I feel like I'm invisible to you.
- And I feel like I'm always going to be the "annoying sibling."
- And it makes me cry when you're not around.
- And I don't want to be in the same room as you.
- And I feel jealous when you're nice to other people but not me.
- And I feel lonely in my own home.
- And I feel like I'll never be good enough for you.

Suggestions for "I feel..."

- I feel hurt when you say mean things.
- I feel scared when you're angry.
- I feel sad when you ignore me.
- I feel left out when you don't include me.
- I feel like you don't care about me.
- I feel upset when you take my stuff.
- I feel like I'm a burden to you.
- I feel like I'm not good enough.
- I feel frustrated when you won't listen to me.
- I feel confused about why you're upset with me.
- I feel unimportant when you don't keep your promises.
- I feel embarrassed when you make fun of me.
- I feel scared when you yell or act aggressively.
- I feel disappointed when you don't stand up for me.
- I feel lonely when you push me away.
- I feel annoyed when you interrupt me.
- I feel rejected when you tell me to go away.
- I feel sad when you don't spend time with me.
- I feel worried when you're upset but won't talk about it.
- I feel angry when you boss me around.
- I feel helpless when you scare me.
- I feel embarrassed when you laugh at me.
- I feel like I can't trust you when you lie about me.
- I feel like giving up when you make everything so hard.
- I feel like crying when you say hurtful things.

Suggestions for "I need..."

- I need you to talk to me in a kind voice.
- I need you to listen to me when I have something to say.
- I need you to respect my things and ask before taking them.
- I need you to keep your promises to me.
- I need you to spend time with me like you said you would.
- I need you to treat me like I matter.
- I need you to stop calling me names.
- I need you to show me that you care.
- I need you to be honest with me.
- I need you to tell me what I've done wrong without being mean.
- I need you to let me be myself without judging me.
- I need you to share with me when it's fair.
- I need you to stop scaring me when you're angry.
- I need you to set a good example for me.
- I need you to be someone I can look up to.
- I need you to help me understand you better.
- I need you to stop pushing me away.
- I need you to treat me like I'm part of the family.
- I need you to care about how I feel.
- I need you to stop making fun of me.
- I need you to see that I look up to you.
- I need you to apologize when you hurt me.
- I need you to work on controlling your anger.
- I need you to let me into your world sometimes.
- I need you to be the sibling I know you can be.

Turning Conflict into Connection:

Parent's guide to strategies for tough conversations

Handout

I feel _____

When you _____

and _____ happens

I need _____

I feel _____

When you _____

and _____ happens

I need _____

I feel _____

When you _____

and _____ happens

I need _____

I feel _____

When you _____

and _____ happens

I need _____