

# Session 2: Connecting and emotional acceptance

## Overview

- Warm-up
- Give group the guidelines from Session 1
- Home activity review and reflection on the week
- Emotional intelligence and your teen's future
- Adolescent emotional development
- Emotion Tuning
- Meta-emotion
- Role-plays
- Managing rejection

## Home activities

- Emotion talk time: Focus on reflecting feelings and avoid problem-solving at this stage. Also focus on lower-intensity emotions.
- Use *Feeling Faces* chart with your teen?
- Read the *What is emotion dismissing parenting?* handout
- Complete the teen discussion activity.



# Adolescent emotional development

The ability to understand and manage emotions improves during adolescence, but puberty can create many emotional challenges. Parents are no longer the main source of assistance; many issues must be resolved by your teen alone.

Changes that affect emotional development include:

- puberty and changes in sexual maturation
- brain and cognitive growth
- changes in sleeping patterns, fatigue
- increasing challenges with intimate relationships and friendships
- development of identity: 'Who am I?' 'Am I normal?'
- autonomy: less parental help is needed or wanted by teenagers in making decisions and managing emotional issues.

Emotional changes can include:

- increased irritability and anger, especially towards parents and family
- at times, improved abilities to regulate their emotions – one effect is that your teen might become better at suppressing or hiding their feelings
- at times, difficulty regulating their emotions – teens feel emotions at greater intensity sometimes, and have less control over them
- emotions appear rapid in their onset and can change constantly
- teens are more emotional about social situations
- emotional withdrawal becomes common
- teens can have insight into their own patterns of emotional reactions – for example, when they get angry they might feel guilty about it
- teens become aware of their own strategies to cope with emotions: listen to music when angry, exercise when stressed or talk to a friend when sad
- embarrassment might increase as your teen compares themselves to others: families and parents can feel criticised by teenagers
- shame about physical, sexual and emotional changes might lead to the teen expressing anger or withdrawing
- increasing stress and anxiety.

Teenagers vary widely in how they cope with this stage of development. If several stressors or transitions occur together, they might feel overwhelmed.

# Emotion Tuning

You can tune into your teen's emotions in a number of different ways.

## Notice the emotion

Notice how you think they are feeling:

- What facial expression/body language does your teen have?
- Does your teen regularly talk about headaches, stomach aches or sore shoulders? Always check whether there is a physical reason first.
- What sort of emotions might your teen feel because of their situation?
- How might you feel in a comparable adult situation?

## Clarify with a question

This helps your teen work out how they feel. Examples include:

- 'You look pretty worried. Do you want to talk about what is going on?'
- 'Was that scary when the teacher called you up to give your speech?'
- 'How did you feel when you saw Toby hanging out with Karl?'
- 'Were you annoyed when your teacher told you off, after Kathy got you into trouble?'
- 'I wonder if you were feeling mad at your sister?'

## Acknowledge, empathise and validate the emotion

One of the most important ways to respond to a young person's emotions is to accept and respond supportively to them. Most often this involves non-verbal responses that show you care and understand, such as:

- Making a soothing noise such as 'hmm', 'oh', 'gosh', 'wow', to convey empathy
- Just sitting with them as they find the words to talk (you could rub their back while remaining silent to allow them time). Convey that you are here for them if (and when) they would like to talk
- 'I'd feel that way too if....', 'I remember how awful that feels' (be careful not to give your opinion too strongly: many young people react badly to this)
- 'That sounds really tough'
- 'How disappointing/frustrating/annoying!'
- 'That's so upsetting, no wonder you are looking a bit sad!'



Validation and empathy are key to Emotion Coaching and provide a lovely connection between parent and child. BUT be careful not to put your emotions first, especially when you are just starting to Emotion Coach.

### **Reflect and label the emotions**

It might help to make a guess about how your teen is feeling, enabling them to think about their feelings, and let you know if you have correctly understood what is happening for them. However, don't leap to this because some young people might feel that you are trying to 'own their feelings'.

Examples include:

- 'I'm wondering if you are feeling a bit tense and angry?'
- 'It sounds like you were really hurt, and feel very sad because of Rosemary's comment.'
- 'Sounds like you're feeling very proud of your speech today!'
- 'You wish you could have a phone like Henry's. It's hard when Henry always gets the newest highest tech phone and you have to stick with your old one.'
- 'It seems like you want to go out with the others, but you feel a bit worried you will get pushed into doing things you don't feel safe doing.'

### **Locate the emotion in the body**

One option is asking where the adolescent feels the emotion in their body. It's very important for young people to learn that emotions are experienced both in the head and body. Physiological awareness of emotions is an important part of emotional awareness. Occasionally, you could use this as an opportunity to talk to your teen about how to use breathing to relieve worry in their stomach.

- 'Sometimes people get really hot and worked up when they feel angry.'
- 'Sometimes my stomach gets churned up when I have to talk in front of people. Do you notice that too?'
- 'Your body looks heavy and sad.'

### **Explore**

You might follow this up with a further question or comment to find out more about the situation or explore other emotional reactions.



# What is emotion dismissive parenting?

Being warm and concerned does not always mean you are responding to the emotions in what your teen is saying.

While being dismissive you might:

- offer advice (for example, 'You should have ...')
- ask why your teen did or said what they did
- talk only about yourself
- tell your teen not to worry
- jump straight into problem solving
- take the side of the other person (for example the teacher, friend or sibling) instead of listening to the teen's perspective
- offer distractions
- moralise.

Adapted from Gottman, J. M. & DeClair, J. (1997). *The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. New York: Simon & Schuster.



# Role-play scenarios

Your teen comes home from school and tells you that they had no one to sit with at school today. They conclude that they have no friends.

Your teen comes home from school and tells you that their teacher told them off for something they did not do.

Your teen refuses to go on camp.

Your teen is not talking to anyone after you said they needed to take turns on the computer with their little brother/sister.

Your teen is very angry and reactive over dinner. You know there are some bullying issues at their school but at this stage they seem reluctant to talk about it.

Think of some other situations that you have experienced recently with your teen, where emotions were involved.



# Managing rejection

One of the challenges of parenting teenagers is managing your own reactions when your teen rejects you, tells you that you 'don't understand', or criticises you for not being a 'good' parent.

The following strategies might help:

- Teens often say things in the heat of the moment. Don't take their words personally or assume this is what they always think. Pushing you away may be part of them learning to have their own 'voice', and becoming an adult. Sometimes they can be hurtful when they assert their growing independence.
- Notice your reaction. Would you call it anger, hurt, worry, disdain or dislike?
- Take a breath. Remind yourself that this is a natural part of adolescence. Try to reflect back the feelings behind your teen's statements: for example, if your teen says, 'I hate you!', you could respond with, 'You are really angry with me because ...'.
- Teens can sometimes make hurtful comments. Try to manage your feelings in the moment, and talk to another adult about your emotional responses.

By not reacting with anger and an attack, you convey that you accept their feelings and independent opinions. This keeps communication open and means that your teen is more likely to talk to you about the issue later.

- Useful statements might include:

'Okay, you might not want to talk now, but I will be here if you want to talk about it later.'

'I can see you are pretty annoyed right now. I'm happy to listen if you want to talk it out some other time.'

'Wow, sounds like you are having a tough time.'

'You might need a little time to think things through. We can chat about it later if you want.'

Never take anything personally that your teen says in anger.



# Responding to rejection

Explore these statements in pairs, or alternatively, fill in the form at home. For each statement, work out:

1. What you might do to turn toward and manage your own feelings of rejection
2. What other responses (such as Emotion Coaching) might help you and your teen. For example, you could take a deep breath and reflect the feelings behind the statement.

**Example: Your teen says, 'I hate you!'**

Take a breath. Step into their shoes - remember feeling this way as a teen. Bite my tongue when I want to say 'You don't hate me!' Instead say, 'I can see you are really angry with me right now ...'. Pause and see what their response is.

**Your teen says, 'Go away! Leave me alone!'**


**Your teen says, 'It's always got to be your way! You're such a hypocrite!'**


**Your teen says, 'Why can't you be like Sarah's mum/dad!'**




**Your teen says, 'I don't need your help!'**


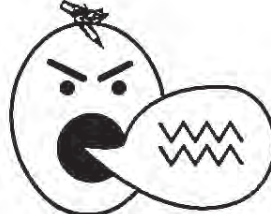















**Your teen says, 'I don't want you to come to the door when you pick me up!'**


**Your teen says, 'Stop lecturing me!'**


**Remember**

- Be aware of and manage your own feelings (deep breath, build in a pause).
- Hold in check your 'automatic reaction'.
- Avoid stating boundaries straight away.
- Convey acceptance of the emotion.
- Don't move on too quickly from your teen's emotional response.

# Feeling faces

			
withdrawn	angry	stressed	excited
			
happy	sad	embarrassed	exhausted
			
hopeful	frustrated	surprised	confused
			
confident	bored	frightened	hurt

Produced by Monica Hedges in partnership with The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

