



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



FAMILY

YOUTH

## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

If we think back to our teenage years, we probably prefer not to repeat them. It's hard to manage the physical, emotional, and other life changes that happen ALL AT ONCE! On top of this, life has thrown COVID-19 into the mix, causing strong emotions for teens. Fortunately, our teens can learn skills to help manage their emotions. We can support our teens and help them learn to manage their emotions while teaching them how to show compassion and [empathy](#) through being a good listener.

### Being a Good Listener and Teaching Empathy

It is important for families to find ways to share thoughts and feelings with each other. We can let our teens know that we understand their emotions by showing them we care about how they feel and what they have to say. Being a good listener helps us to gain a different perspective and better understand what our teens are going through. Reacting to our teen's emotions in a positive way helps them to feel better understood.

#### *Listening and Empathy Activities*

- **Thinking about a story from a different point of view.** Encourage your teen to think of a favorite book or news article they've read. Ask them to think about the following questions: Who is telling the story? Whose point of view is the story being told from? How might the story be different if it were being told from a different character's point of view? How might the story be different if the character were a different gender or from a different country? How does point of view influence the information received?
- **Validating feelings.** Sometimes when people share feelings of fear, anger, or sadness, those they share with try to "fix" these difficult feelings. They may say things like "Don't think like that" or "Don't worry, things will get better." Listen carefully and support your teen's feelings by saying things like "I can see how you would feel that way," "It must be hard to feel that way," or "That is an awful lot to be feeling right now." Encourage your teen to validate the feelings of others as they learn how to listen and see things from a different view.
- **A minute of freedom.** Oftentimes, we edit what we say to others. Give your teen a chance to say *exactly* what they think or feel by offering them a "Minute of Freedom." Encourage your teen to do this, letting them know that there will be no consequences and you won't talk about it later. Invite your teen to enjoy their freedom (for a minute)! Keep in mind that if your teen says something that makes you think they are in danger or are planning to do something against the law, it is important to let someone know.

To learn more about the science behind teaching empathy, you may wish to read the below research:

- [The Science of Empathy](#)
- [The Emerging Study of Positive Empathy](#)