

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

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Negotiating with Adolescents

REMEMBER:

- *Take the time to think about what you really want to say before entering into discussions. Take some breathing space to let your emotions settle.*
- *Offer an invitation to talk about the problem – schedule an uninterrupted time to discuss the issue and brainstorm solutions.*
- *Define the problem from your own perspective, and be prepared to listen to the other's viewpoint*
- *Be prepared to think about the pros and cons of all the options, and make a decision together.*

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Negotiation and teenagers may seem like two words that often don't go together! However it is possible for families to achieve this, with commitment and a genuine desire to reach a reasonable outcome.

Negotiation is the process of reaching agreement on a particular issue. It is one of the most common forms of dispute resolution, or decision-making around difficult topics.

Negotiation is a problem-solving approach in which both people (or parties) attempt to reach a joint decision. It involves each person being prepared to:

1. talk about what they want or need
2. actively listen to what the other person has to say
3. think about the differences between perspectives
4. generate possible solutions
5. make an agreement

For negotiation to be successful both have to adopt a win/win approach. It is unhelpful to stand your ground or refuse to compromise. Negotiation is all about working towards each person getting the best possible outcome.

Negotiating with teenagers is often difficult because it can feel like a competition between who is right and who is wrong, who has more power, and what is okay and not okay in terms of behaviour and social activities. Because of this competitive aspect, conversations can often become a fight (sometimes bitter and dramatic!) and end with someone storming off, crying, or else the parent just saying "NO"!

Tips for helpful negotiation:

- Allow yourself time to think about the issue. You might find it helpful to say something like: “I want to talk this through properly rather than reacting emotionally”; or “I just need to think about this before we talk. It might help for you to do the same”.
- Make some notes about the risks and benefits of the issue as you see them.
- Make a time to talk through the issue which suits everyone, without distractions. Turn off the TV and put the phones onto answering machine. Allow sufficient time to finish the process.
- Invite the teenager(s) to share their thoughts and define how they see the issue.
- Share your thoughts about what the main issue is, so that you can then all agree on what you are negotiating, for example, “is it OK to go to a party and what time is it acceptable to get home?”
- Brainstorm all possible options. Don't censor at this stage – let everyone have a say so that you can think about possibilities and everyone feels heard.
- Together discard the obviously unacceptable options.
- Explore each of the possible options, highlighting strengths and weaknesses.
- Together decide which works best for all of you – this might take some time!
- Decide together how to put the decision into action – this involves working out all the fine details, for example, what to do if they get frightened, how they are getting home, what should happen if they get home late, etc. This way, in the event something does happen, you are not trying to make decisions in crisis-mode.



Children and adolescents learn through their parents modelling appropriate skills and behaviours. Through implementing good negotiation strategies you are teaching your child how to problem-solve and reach compromise when faced with difficult situations.

If young people are encouraged to develop effective negotiation skills, they will be able to maintain positive relationships both now and into adulthood. This means that you will be giving them a fabulous start in life!

If you would like to discuss this issue or any other parenting issues or concerns, Parent Line counsellors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Parent Line provides a free, professional, confidential service to all parents and carers of children across NSW. Phone 1300 1300 52