



# The TOOLBOX

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



## HOW CAN WE PROMOTE THE EXPRESSION OF TEENS' EMOTIONS?

**TOOL:** Prevention | Intervention

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Teens

**TOOL INTENDED FOR:** Professionals | Parents

### DESIGN

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– Details: Teachers, psychoeducators, special education technicians, psychologists, educational consultants, parents.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:**

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– Teens who have difficulty managing their emotions, particularly children who are stressed, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive, oppositional, aggressive, anxious, depressed or those with autism spectrum disorder.

**NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS**

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– Difficulty appropriately expressing negative emotions.

**SPECIFIC GOALS**

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– To help parents promote the expression of their teens' emotions.

**DESIGN**

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## HOW CAN WE PROMOTE THE EXPRESSION OF TEENS' EMOTIONS?

Adolescence is a time of change for both parents and youth. This period is characterized not only by teens' physical changes, but also by the significant development of their identity and their desire to gain autonomy.

These changes also affect teens' thoughts and emotions. For example, they may find it difficult to consider other peoples' viewpoints, become less tolerant of frustrations, respond more strongly to change, engage in risky behaviours, refuse to communicate, or isolate themselves. When they talk about what they are going through, they don't always do it in an appropriate way, so that others don't want to listen to them. In short, many teenagers find it difficult to appropriately express their difficult emotions. Appropriately expressing emotions is therefore an important aspect to work on. To help teens better manage their emotions, it's important to keep communication channels open with them. The following are some suggestions to help teens manage their emotions.

### Listen

Maintaining communication channels with your teens inevitably involves being attentive and listening. But opening up to others and expressing your feelings isn't always easy. We therefore need to show them that they can confidently share their problems or questions. To encourage this dialogue, it's preferable that the discussion occur in a place that is conducive to confiding, self-expression and listening. So that they know that you understand what they are telling you, you can simply use their words. By using rephrasing, you show them that the message has been properly received and understood, avoiding misinterpretation.

#### MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Doing something else at the same time (e.g. being on your cell phone or replying to emails);
- Being more interested in telling the teens than listening to what the teens are saying;
- Reading the other person's thoughts, irrespective of their own reality;
- Judging what the teens are saying and making comments without giving the teens time to finish their ideas;
- Giving advice or suggesting solutions too quickly without giving the teens time to find their own solutions;
- Interrupting;
- Not taking the teens' concerns seriously and telling them that it's not serious or not important.

### Spend time with the teens

It's important to spend quality time with the teens. They will see that you are there for them and will be more inclined to speak with you, whether it's about their problems or joys. Make sure you plan enough time with them to do activities such as going to the movies, hiking, skiing or biking. You can also come to an agreement among family members to have at least one meal a day together. These activities will help you get to know and communicate better with your teens.

## Share your own experiences

When you have the opportunity, talk about your personal experiences and what you experienced during your own adolescence. When you talk about what you've experienced, the teens will be more comfortable speaking with you about what they are now experiencing. However, you should be careful not to compare your experiences to theirs.

## Choose the right time to talk

Not all times are appropriate to start a discussion with your teens, particularly when it's time to talk about a sensitive topic. It's important to schedule times when family members can express how they feel in a climate that is conducive to communication. This means that it's essential to leave distractions aside. For example, put your cell phone on "do not disturb" and turn off the TV and other electronic devices. You should also make sure you have enough time to talk.

When appropriate times are rare, it may be helpful to set up a **Family Council** at a suitable frequency. It's a way to take stock of family life or what happened outside the home. It's a special moment for family members to discuss their sorrows and joys, to congratulate themselves, to express their wishes and to solve problems. Depending on the frequency of your family council, allow enough time for everyone to express themselves (e.g. at least 60 minutes if the family council is held monthly). It's up to all family members to agree on a frequency. It should be a time to promote healthy communication within the family where all people are free from daily concerns (television, homework, etc.). While improving communication within the family and strengthening relationships, the council facilitates the resolution of family problems. Invite family members who wish to congratulate someone else for something they have done well during the week. Do follow-ups. This is an opportunity to discuss family problems in order to prevent conflict. This step is essential for good relationships among family members. Lastly, make sure there is a time to allow family members to make suggestions to enhance family life.

### OTHER HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

- **Respect feelings and opinions.**
- **Stay calm.**
- **Encourage.**
- **Be honest.**



## Use “I” messages

Set an example for the teens by using the appropriate way to express yourself. Use “I” messages to express what you have to say and encourage your teens to do the same to express their emotions. There are various ways to do this. The following are some suggestions:

CLUES	EXPLANATIONS	EXAMPLES
<b>When...</b>	Describe the situation or context that causes your emotions. Be careful not to blame people.	“When I’m asked to go home before 9:00 p.m....”
<b>I feel...</b>	Name the emotion experienced using “I.”	“...I feel frustrated...”
<b>Because...</b>	Explain why you feel like this.	“...because I have to go home before all my friends, as if I were a child...”
<b>I’d like...</b>	Specify what you’d like in order to feel better.	“I’d like to be trusted more and allowed to return an hour later.”



## Teach them to communicate their emotions

Emotions are often expressed indirectly. In doing so, communication may be blurred. When the opportunity arises, make the teens aware of the mistakes they make when expressing their emotions. To clearly express your emotions, you should avoid some pitfalls:

### PITFALLS OF EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

- **Shouting names** (labelling or insulting): "You're deaf" instead of "I feel like you're not listening to me. This is frustrating me.";
- **Dictating or giving orders**: "Shut up!" instead of "What you just said hurts me";
- **Asking**: "What are you doing with Marc?" instead of "I'm worried about seeing you with a guy who always has problems in class";
- **Accusing**: "You're always on my back" instead of "I don't like it when you accuse me without taking the time to listen to my point of view.";
- **Being sarcastic**: "I'm glad you're on time!" instead of "I'm angry you're late. So, we haven't started working yet and we're going to fall behind."

It's not always possible to verbally express the emotions felt. Sometimes they are so confused, you really don't know how to express them. Other times, they can be so painful (for example, during a tragic event) that you prefer to keep them quiet. Provide teens with creative activities to promote self-expression, such as drawing, writing, singing, music, visual arts and role-playing.

## What about texting?

Today, cell phones are teens' preferred means of communication. It's important not to fall into the trap of endless texting conversations with your teens. While it's true that texting is a good way to keep in touch, it's best to try to have the most important conversations in person. Texting leaves too much room for misinterpretation and messages can be easily ignored.

## CONCLUSION

There are many ways to promote teens' appropriate emotional expression. In short, don't be afraid to try out various ways to find out what works and learn more about your teens' development. The emotions they experience may also be so intense that it's better to consult a specialist to help your teens feel better. The important thing is to be actively involved in your teens' lives!

# BIBLIOGRAPHY



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