



# 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 difficult to manage the physical, emotional, and life changes that happen ALL AT ONCE! In the teen years, On top of this, life has thrown COVID-19 into the mix, generating strong emotions for teens and tweens. Fortunately, teens and tweens can learn skills to help manage their emotions, like developing their ability to identify and express their feelings without being hurtful to themselves or others. Caregivers can support teenagers and help them learn to manage their emotions by paying attention, displaying acceptance and [empathy](#), providing gentle firmness, and using non-judgmental language while being willing to negotiate.

**Using I statements when communicating feelings.** Emotional skills require a variety of communication skills such as using "I" statements. This allows people to convey feelings and needs without blame while helping others understand the speaker's perspective. Here is an example of an "I" statements:

- I feel [name feelings] when [explain behavior] because [explain why]. Could we [explain or ask for solutions]?
- I feel frustrated and disappointed when the dishwasher is not emptied because I do not have everything that I need to prepare dinner. What would help you remember to empty the dishwasher as soon as you wake up?

**Empathy** is the ability to recognize and relate to other people's emotions and thoughts. Empathic thinking is often characterized as the willingness and ability to place oneself in another person's situation ("shoes"), to feel another person's feelings, or to recognize that another person might experience feelings in the same way as oneself.

**Help your teenager practice empathy.** To help them understand another person's perspective have your teenager pick someone in your house and ask them to "*metaphorically*" exchange shoes with this person. Then ask them:

- Why did you select this person's shoes?
- Would someone else's shoes have been easier or more difficult to wear?
- Do their shoes feel different this year as compared to a year ago?
- Do their shoes feel different now compared to how they would have felt before COVID-19?
- What feelings or emotions would this person like to share?
- Why are they experiencing these feelings? these emotions?
- Have they discovered that they understand something new about the person by "wearing" their shoes?

Remember you can always lighten the mood by introducing some humor. Consider doing the "[Walk in Their Shoes](#)" TikTok challenge. Swap shoes with a family member. Do a race or walk around the neighborhood or your yard (but remember to follow social distancing guidelines – stay six feet apart).

Take a video and post to the **Families Tackling Tough Times Together** Facebook group!