

Five Things to Help You Have Better Conversations with Youth Ages 10 to 14

FORWARD TOGETHER

Understanding where your child is in their development can help you better approach conversations with them

The world pulls us in many directions. It's easy to forget to check-in and have meaningful conversations with the young people in our lives but checking in with your kids is important – for them and for you.

Yet, parents and caregivers still worry that anything they say or do with young people will only produce eye-rolls. **Kids from 10 to 14 need your attention and support on their path to adulthood.**

Research shows that young people who feel they have good relationships with adults and peers thrive in school and at home and are less likely to use substances and take other risks.

Here are some ideas for creating strong relationships with youth.

Tip: Try these tips one at a time. Take your time. Remember that they may not work 100 percent of the time, but you'll get credit for trying.

Show them you care and they matter – This is the place where nearly all parents start, and you're probably already doing it. It can still feel hard sometimes. That's totally normal. Even if they aren't ready to talk, being there to listen shows that you care. Don't get too hung up on "quality time." Any kind of time spent, or caring gesture, will get noticed and make a difference. Here are some meaningful ways to show you care:

- When they come to you and want to talk, give them your full attention.
- Stay calm. 10- to 14-year-olds still look to their parents for advice, but they want to know you're listening. Let them explain without interrupting. Then you can talk and brainstorm solutions with them.

"I wish my mom would just say nothing and listen and try to be more understanding when I'm having these times."

– Aurora high schooler

Challenge them to grow – Young people at this age are just beginning to explore new interests. Encourage them to be open to change. When they get stuck, help them out so they can keep exploring new experiences and ideas.

- Let them know you expect them to try, not just go through the motions.

- When they fail, remind them that failure is not final and that mistakes lead to growth.

Provide support at all times – Even though they're just starting to strike out on their own, youth want to have a safety net to fall back on. Consistency. Encouragement. Fair and clear limits. Someone to back them up when they're in trouble.

- Make sure they know you're there for them in hard situations, like the switch from elementary to middle school or when they try something new.
- Let them explore new things but provide fair and clear rules. Young people will push back on rules but setting and following them are good for young people in the long run.

Share power and respect their input – At this age, children start to realize that their parents don't know everything, and they want to try their own way. While they may not fully understand your views and decisions, you're building skills for their later teen years that will empower them.

- Listen and think about what they are saying and try to avoid immediate "no's" or put-downs.
- Have them take the lead on both small and big things. Have them plan an outing or a meal. Ask them to make decisions about the classes or after-school activities they want to do.

Help them broaden their world – 'Adolescence' means "to grow". These years are all about exploring their world. Help them find safe opportunities to do just that.

- On good days, offer inspiration. Yes, explore that career. Yes, dream of that trip. Yes, there are possibilities.
- On challenging days, empower them to brainstorm solutions to their problems.
- Connect them with people and experiences that show those possibilities. Look to teachers, rec centers, online classes or free community activities to expand their view of the world.

Most importantly remember these conversations and relationships are two-way. As a parent or caregiver, you are learning and growing too.

Also, give yourself credit – just taking the time to read this and learn shows your commitment to building better relationships with the young people in your life. Now give some of these tips a try!

Get additional ideas and tips at: [ForwardTogetherCO.com](https://www.ForwardTogetherCO.com)