



Intergenerational Conflict In Migrant Families Teenage Years

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References:

- ABCD - Parenting Adolescents Parenting Program
- More Fun, Less Fights - Family Violence Program
- Vietnamese Parenting Program
- Parenting in a New Culture Parent Guides
- Robert Sylvester: The adolescent brain
- Maurice Balson: Becoming better parents
- Roger W. McIntire: Teenagers and Parents: 10 steps for a better relationship
- Barbara Coloroso: Kids are worth it!

Acknowledgements:

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Getting to know your teenagers

- In Australia, your children will be referred to as teenagers from the ages of 13 until 19 years of age
- Teenage years are typically confusing for the young person because they feel they are no longer a child or an adult
- Your teenager is likely to spend more time talking with friends and schoolmates than talking with you
- Your teenager will see other teenagers at school or in the local neighbourhood who experiment with drugs or alcohol or who may have a girlfriend or boyfriend
- Your teenager is experiencing changes to their brain and body and hormones at once. These changes will directly affect their moods and behaviours and their physical appearance
- Your teenager is desperately wanting to be accepted by their friends or classmates so they will change their hairstyle or their clothes to try to fit in
- Your teenager is more likely to want to spend more private time alone in their bedroom and even become secretive about their plans or thoughts
- Your teenager is likely to feel very self-conscious about themselves and showing your disapproval of them especially in front of others is certain to cause excessive shame or embarrassment

- Your teenager is constantly trying to find out who they are as a separate individual from you as parents which may lead to acting in ways that reject your values and ethnic traditions. Don't worry, this is only a short term phase and usually passes
- Your teenager will become very stressed at any kind of rejection by their friends or peers. This may seem trivial to you, but to the teenager it feels like a catastrophe

Exercise: Try to truthfully remember or even talk to your own family or brothers or sisters about what you were like as a teenager. Follow this through by sharing some of your experiences with your own child

Tip: This will hopefully allow you to feel more sympathy with your own teenager(s) challenges and allow your own teenager to feel that you understand them a little.



Smart parenting of teenagers

- Think about and learn to talk about your values as parents and how these values translate in how you want your children to behave. Talk to your children about why these values are important to you and your wife or husband and the family members involved in looking after your children
- Set a good example for your children and talk to them about the rules that reflect your family values well before they become teenagers so they know what to expect. These conversations should begin around the age of 11-12 years so your children are clear about your expectations of them and the freedoms and responsibilities they will have as they get older
- Consult with your teenager about any major decisions that affect your teenager. Explain that you as parents will make the final decisions but that your teenagers opinions will be taken seriously
- Teach your children as early as possible that all actions have consequences and that they have choices in how they behave. Explain that irresponsible or bad behaviour will not just result in being punished but may also limit their future choices
- Determine which parts of the new Australian culture to adopt and which parts of your original culture to retain; write a list. Make sure you and your family agree about your ethnic cultural rules and traditions that you want the family to practice and explain to your teenager why maintaining your ethnic traditions and values is important to you and the family
- Make sure that you as parents have the final say and authority in disciplining your children and decisions affecting your teenager NOT grandparents or teachers
- Make sure that you are always setting the example for your children. If they see you lying they will eventually learn to lie to you. If you swear they will give themselves permission to swear at you
- Regularly show affection to your teenager and compliment them when they try to learn something new through their initiative and consistent effort
- Maintain a calm manner, do not yell or use violence against your teenager even when your patience is being tested. Your teenager will respect your self control and be more likely to listen to you when you address the problem

Exercise: With your husband or wife, sit down and write down the top 5 values you want to instil in your teenager/s before they become adults. Do this exercise when your children are born or as early as possible in their lives.

Tip: You must both agree on these values so that you do not confuse your children as they grow up.



How to discipline your teenager

- Teenagers should learn to understand that their actions have consequences. It is your responsibility as a parent to help your teenager understand this idea as early as possible
- When your teenager refuses to cooperate with you, remind them of the rules and the consequences. For example, you might say, "If you don't do your homework first, you can't go to see the movies with your cousins on the weekend"
- If your teenager is behaving badly make sure that you impose discipline immediately. If they say sorry or try to make you laugh or smile or even try to distract you by changing the topic stick to imposing the agreed discipline. You are still allowed to laugh along with them, but it is important to be consistent in your discipline
- Remember that you need to be balanced, and that discipline also involves rewarding good behaviour. Remember to reward your teenager by praising them soon after you learn about their effort, progress or achievement. Even as adults we also like to receive compliments and encouragement. Be sincere and simple
- Keep your word when punishing or rewarding your teenagers. Do not argue with them about the punishment or forget to follow through with promises you have made to reward them
- If your children get into trouble with the authorities such as their school or even the police remember you must first try to remain calm. Ignoring the problem, blaming the authorities as being racist, yelling, crying or hitting your teenager doesn't solves the problem
- Set rules and limits that are appropriate for the age of your teenager as they get older. The rules have to be adjusted to fit their maturity and what is practised by others parents in the community with teenagers at similar ages. For example, a 14 year old might not be allowed to go to a party, but when they turn 16 or 17 they maybe allowed to accompany cousins or older brothers and sisters
- If your teenager is in serious trouble, you need to treat it seriously and you will need to invest significant time over the following weeks and months conversing with your teenager. You may need to take time off work to spend a lot of time talking to them about the actual incident and trying to work out your teenager's motives and thoughts
- If your teenager is involved in serious trouble you will need to establish a high degree of communication with your teenager in working out ways how to prevent this situation being repeated in the future. Solving these types of problems may require the assistance of a trusted professional or someone that your teenager respects that can work with you to influence your teenager

Exercise: Try using these techniques with your adolescent over the next couple of weeks and see which ones they respond to best, and which are the most effective. Make sure you encourage them to understand why you are using these techniques, and that you are doing this because you want to help them with the challenges they face in life.

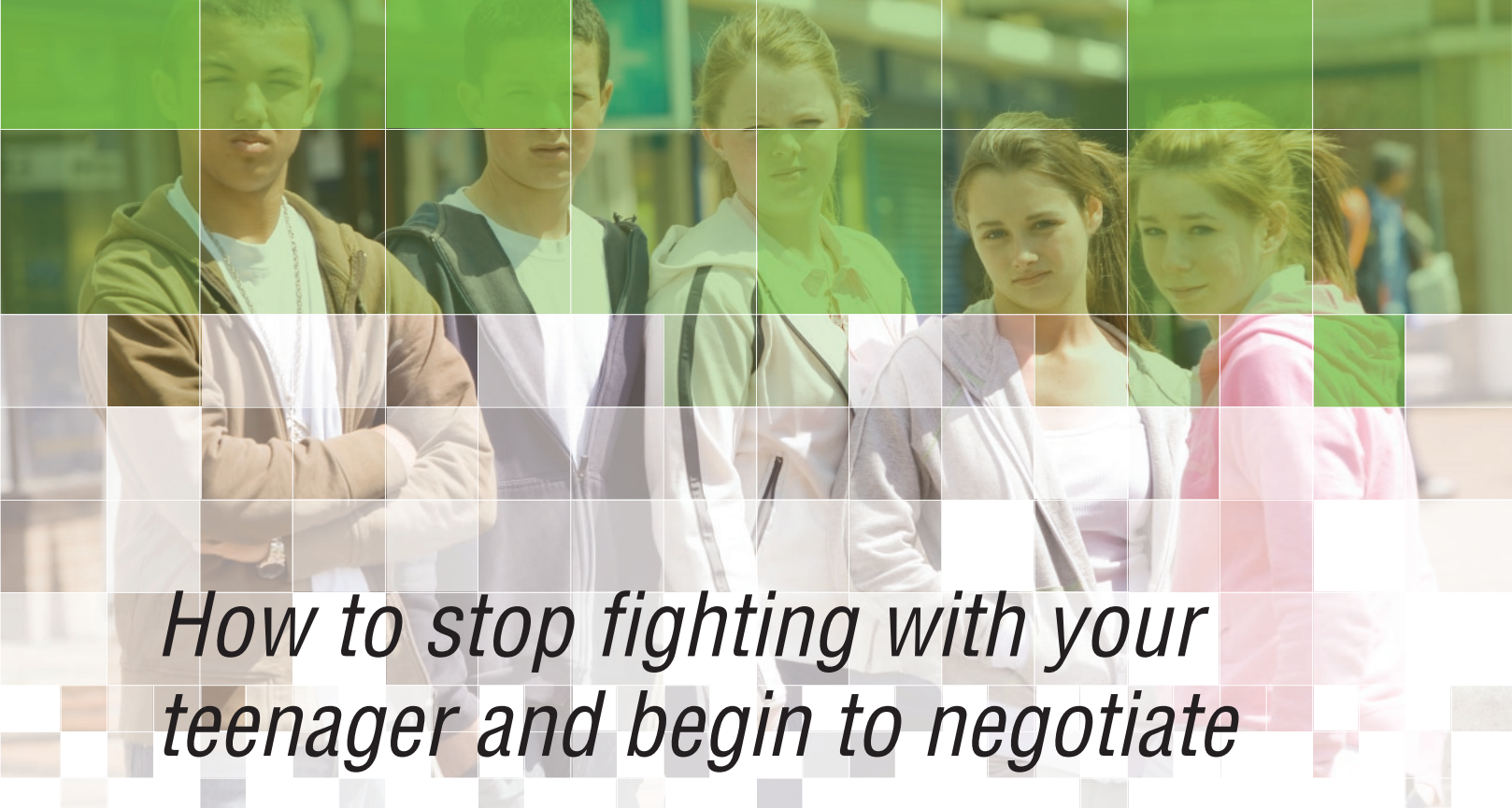


Communicating with your teenager

- Don't quickly change topics or ignore them when they are asking you permission for something. Try to only answer their question
- Do not always complain about them or bring up the past. For example, when discussing when they need to be at home, do not start the conversation by talking about the last time they came home late
- Even if you are angry, avoid accusing your teenager of being the cause of the family problems. For example saying, "you will destroy this family" or "your father is ill because of you" only serves to make them feel guilty or distant
- Do not attack or humiliate your teenager by calling them names such as 'lazy', 'stupid', 'selfish', or a 'liar'. Even if you don't mean it, your teenager will believe that is what you think of them
- Do not try to comment on their behaviour through mind reading. For example saying, "you did that just to upset me". Try asking them about their reasons instead of jumping to conclusions
- Do not overgeneralise describing their behaviour. For example saying, "you never listen" or "I always have to pick up after you" actually stops your teenager from listening or being sensitive to what you have to say
- Try to show that you are giving your full attention to your teenager when talking with them. This means asking questions, making eye contact with them and encouraging them to talk to you
- Check with your teenager that you actually understand what they are trying to say by summarizing what you have heard by saying, "From what you have said I understand that you..."
- Remember learning to listen to your child is a very hard skill to master because some of us have a habit of interrupting or we are easily distracted by younger children, housework, etc. Resume your conversation with your teenager by finding a quiet time to talk, for example when the younger children have gone to bed
- Try to remain calm, even when your teenager has said or done something to upset you. This might mean you have to leave the situation and find ways to calm down before talking to them
- It is important that you as parents try not to solve your teenager's problems by telling them what the solutions are. Part of growing up means that you have to learn to find your own solutions

Exercise: Learn to stop the constant criticising of your children. Spend the next week looking for, and talking about, the good things they have done. Check to see their reactions to you.

Tip: Complimenting you is probably something that your parents did not practice when you were a teenager. By giving your teenager praise and positive encouragement, they teenager may find it easier to talk to you more openly.



How to stop fighting with your teenager and begin to negotiate

Step 1: Set aside a few hours when trying to solve a long term problem area that causes constant fighting. You need to be calm and have enough time to solve the problem without interruptions. Ask someone to act as a mediator if you need help to work through these steps. The mediator must be neutral and not take sides and keep the matter confidential. This could be your local priest or Imam, a professional social worker, trusted teacher, etc.

Step 2: Define the problem, in terms of what your needs are and what your teenager's needs are as they relate specifically to the problem that's causing the fighting

- Are you listening to your adolescent when they try to explain their needs or plans?
- Try to refrain from expressing your negative feelings (such as anger) by yelling or criticising them?
- Try reassure your teenager that:
 - you are looking for a solution to the problem that will try to take into account both of your needs and what you both want
 - neither of you will stand to lose if you find a solution to your constant fighting
 - that you are trying to solve the fighting without blame and anger and are trying to see all sides to the problem
 - you are responsible for them as their parent to look after their best interests

Step 3: Talk about possible solutions

- Think of as many solutions to the problem as possible
- Look at the positive and negative side of each idea
- You may need to take a couple of days to think about the cause of the problem you outlined before and then write down four or five different ways you think the problem can be solved without creating further conflict before you begin this process of negotiation
- Avoid ridiculing or harshly criticising your adolescent's proposed solutions even if they seem silly to you
- Come up with a number of alternative solutions even if they are unrealistic in the short term
- Remember that your aim is not to 'win' but to come up with a solution to stop fighting and that is what winning is about in this situation

Step 4: Evaluate all possible solutions

- Be honest when examining each possible solution and ask your teenager to participate rather than letting you taking over
- Analyse thoroughly the arguments for and against each solution in meeting both your needs
- Ask practical questions about how each solution would be implemented and what difference it would make to both of you
- Consider whether the outcome of each solution is fair to both you and your teenager in terms of meeting your needs

Step 5: Choose the solution you both agree on

- Avoid imposing your own solution without explaining your reasons
- Ensure that you both understand that the chosen solution is associated with possible consequences
- If you cannot agree to a solution, trial one solution that you both might find acceptable to a degree and set a time to review it within a fortnight from the agreement to see how it is working for you both

Step 6: Act on the solution that you both agree on

- Discuss who does what, and by when
- Do not doubt your teenagers intentions to commit to the solution and be encouraging instead of dismissive of their future potential
- Confront your teenager as soon as they stop making an effort to see the solution through and have an urgent meeting, possibly with a mediator to address the loss of motivation

Step 7: Evaluate the solution

If you've made it this far and have implemented the solution, you need to meet again after a period of time (either several days or weeks) to discuss whether the solution has worked. If you need to make minor changes to the solution you've agreed to, write them down again. Here are some suggestions to follow:

- Make it a pleasant experience – perhaps over a meal or family treat
- If the solution has worked well, acknowledge the effort and progress achieved and mark this by celebrating the success
- If the solution hasn't worked fully, rather than reject the solution out of hand, think of modifications that may make it work better
- Again, listen carefully to what your adolescent is saying
- Be open and honest. Pretending the problem has been solved when it hasn't will only lead to more issues down the track

If you found these steps too difficult to follow or unsuccessful, remember that you can always seek further support and expert advice. A list of available resources and supports is included in the final tip sheet in this series.



Bridging the “cultural” gap between you and your teenager

- Teenagers who’ve spent most of their life in Australia are likely to reject your cultural values and ethnic heritage as soon as they become aware that this makes them different to some of their peers
- Your teenager is likely to feel embarrassed about the fact that your family lives differently and has different traditions to the Australian family life that is depicted on commercial TV shows like ‘Neighbours’ or ‘Home and Away’
- The teenage stage involves your teenager getting to know who they are as a separate person from you. Your teenager will be wanting to claim a degree of an Australian identity given that they have spent most of their life in Australia
- It is important to recognise that your children are growing up in a different country and in a different time to when you were their age. This means that their experiences, and subsequent identity, WILL be different from yours
- You can encourage greater understanding and acceptance of cultural heritage through teaching your child the language that is spoken at home. This might be easier if your children are enrolled in ethnic schools where they are taught their language and mix with other children from their ethnic background
- Do not try to become overly nostalgic about your homeland with your teenagers. Most parents, having been away from their homeland, can exaggerate how good the old days were in their home country
- Do not threaten to send your teenagers back home as a form of punishment if they are misbehaving. Always try to talk about the idea of going back to your home country as a rewarding holiday for you and the family
- When you are watching TV or people behaving badly on the streets, try not to jump to the conclusion that they are reflecting common Australian culture and behaviours. Please remember that people born in Australia over many generations are diverse and the behaviour of one person does not represent all Australians
- Encourage your children to attend ethnic functions or to go to church/mosque, but it may be that during the teenage years they may lose interest in or lack enthusiasm for such activities. Try to persevere and keep your humour, and remember that this is a phase
- We recommend that you encourage your teenagers to bring their friends to your home so you can spend time with them before you make a decision about their level of suitability. Do not make your decision based on the fact that they have the same ethnic backgrounds as yourself. Try to form these opinions objectively

EXERCISE: Tracing your family tree. You can begin to teach your teenager about their ethnic background and family origins by sitting down together and doing a family tree. This may involve researching your family on the internet and pulling together photo’s and stories told by relatives about your extended family.

TIP: This is useful in identifying key strengths & achievements of your ancestors & their triumphs & challenges.



Helping your teenager succeed in school

- It is important to encourage your teenager to have a positive attitude towards learning and that learning can be fun. Talk to them about school from an early age, and why it is so important to succeed at school for their future
- Encourage your teenager to talk about any problems or difficulties they are having at school. If you need help supporting your teenager with their assignments and homework, talk to the school to find out how they can help you
- Teenagers often find the transition between primary school and high school difficult because their responsibilities change and they are often separated from their childhood friends. Start introducing responsibilities around the home (such as cleaning or looking after younger children) from the age of 10 so they feel more prepared when they reach high school
- In high school your teenager will be asked to choose some subjects which are optional. Encourage them to choose subjects they are good at in year 7, 8 and 9. This will keep them interested in school and learning
- In year 10, 11 and 12 encourage your teenager to choose subjects that will help them to get into the career or job they would like to do when they leave school. Make sure they have 1 subject they excel in
- Many teenagers find the competition stressful in year 10, 11 and 12. Try not to place too much pressure on them to fulfil your dreams. Try to think of them as their own people as well
- It is important for your teenager to feel that you are interested and involved in their schooling. Ask them about their tests and assignments and what they are learning about. Ask them to explain things to you that you may not have heard before. Celebrate their successes and any progress they make
- If your teenager is not going to school or doing their school work, try not to become angry. Ask them why they are behaving in this way and ask them about their feelings about school. Remind them that it is important that they go to school and do their best and why it is so important
- Your teenager might not go to University and become a doctor if they fail maths and science. It is important that you focus on their strengths and the areas they show natural ability for. Persisting with areas of weakness will leave you both disappointed
- Encourage a love of learning from an early age. You have to role model this for your children and make sure learning at home is fun and interactive. Encouraging children to ask questions and learn new ideas and information is the best start you can give them for their education

EXERCISE: Remember that you have strengths and weaknesses.

Think about the things you find easy and the things you find hard.

Are you good with dates and remembering information?

Are you good at working out how things work practically?

Are you good at coming up with new ideas or relating to people?

Talk to your teenager about your answers. Ask them the same questions. Talk about how you are similar and how you are different. Use this as a starting point for talking about what profession they would like to work in when they are older.

Tip: Talking about your differences and similarities will let your teenager learn about their natural strengths and weaknesses.

This will help them make the right choices for their future based on their strengths and interests, not your own.



How to raise a confident and resilient teenager

- Do not solve their problems, or leave them alone to solve the problems by themselves. You need to show that you genuinely have confidence in them solving their own problems and that means encouraging and supporting them through the process of problem solving
- Be realistic and do not demand perfection in your children. Acknowledge and focus on their strengths and the areas they need to work on
- Even if this is not in your culture, your teenager will appreciate praise from you when they do well. Always be honest when you praise them and avoid exaggeration
- Do not overreact when a child fails at something. Help your adolescent learn that they will have experiences of failure throughout their life. This means exploring the causes of failure and talking with them about what they learned from having failed
- Teach your adolescent to be optimistic, even if they have a bad experience. That means they need to always learn to put things into perspective and see the positive side of any life experience, even if it is painful
- Give responsibility and show that you trust your teenager with family responsibilities, such as looking out for their younger brothers & sisters, or taking a part-time job after school as they get older
- Acknowledge your teenager's contribution in the family and society and celebrate their achievements, such as their first job or doing well in their school work
- Speak positively and do not call them names such as "silly", "stupid" or "lazy". Teenagers often take these to heart and do not always realize that you do not mean it
- Teach your teenager to accept failure as an inevitable part of learning and growing up. Persisting at something after having failed is a true mark of general confidence
- Self confidence can vary from culture to culture. In some cultures it is based on appearance, gender, being good at school or coming from a wealthy family
- Try not to focus on correcting what you see as faults in their children, sometimes in front of teachers or other family members. No one is perfect
- Your teenager failing at one thing does not mean they will fail in life. Always encourage your teenager to keep trying despite their failures

EXERCISE: Sit down with your teenager and both think about something very important you dropped out of or gave up on because you thought you had failed. What would you do differently? How could you have made it work? Talk about these things together and give each other feedback about why you would have liked them to keep going. Don't blame each other or argue about what should have happened, just discuss it to learn for the future.

Tip: Talking about the need to accept failure and to persevere after failing at something is critical. Being honest with your teenager will reinforce for them that it is not the failures in life that are important or remembered, it is the willingness to keep trying and move beyond them.



How to stop stressing about your teenager

- Acknowledge your own parenting skills and strengths. You need to accept yourself as a “good enough” parent. This means not to seek perfection and accept that your children, like yourself, are not perfect
- Don't take your children's misbehaviour personally, their behaviour is not about you, and how you are judged by society. This means accepting that your children will make mistakes and will need to work through problems throughout their lives
- You should not feel guilty about occasionally taking time off for yourself with your wife or husband. Remember, the most important role model for your teenager in how to cope with stress is you
- Your uncontrolled anger can make family stress worse. This may lead your children to copy your angry behaviour and become even more disrespectful or rebellious. So learn to remove yourself from the situation once you feel out of control, by taking a walk or taking exercise
- You should try to resolve stressful situations before they get out of hand. This means learning to negotiate with your teenager if you have become stuck in fighting daily. Check Tip Sheet 5 to learn to stop fighting and start negotiating with your teenager
- Do some exercise when you feel stressed, such as walking or another activity to help you relax
- Remember that you are not alone. Try to expand your social network. Discuss your concerns with other parents experiencing similar family stress
- Make your family members your best friends. Discuss issues with them. Do not try and deal with family problems and stress all by yourself
- Remember that parenting is not an exact science and that, given that you and your teenager are different individuals, there will always be room for error

Exercise: Make a time to talk to parents from your own community whose children are now young adults. Ask them how migrating to Australia affected how they brought up their teenagers and how they dealt with some of the challenges

Tip: This will help you understand that most parents get through the teenage years successfully even when at times the job of parenting teenagers seems extremely difficult in a new culture

Resources and services for parents and facilitators

The following phone numbers and websites are provided for you to get further help in particular areas.

Child Abuse

- Australian Childhood Foundation – information about prevention and other services.
www.stopchildabuse.com.au

Parenting

- Parentline 13 22 89
www.parentline.vic.gov.au
- Parentzone 03-8470 9999
www.anglicarvic.org.au/parentzone/northern
- Parent easy guides
www.parenting.sa.gov.au
www.parentingideas.com.au
www.parentlink.act.gov.au
- ABCD parenting
www.abcdparenting.org

Drugs and Alcohol

- Drug info clearinghouse – drug prevention information: 1300 85 84
www.druginfo.adf.org.au
- Directline 1800 888 236 (drug info 24 hrs 7 days)
Moreland Hall 03-9386 2876
www.familydrughelp.sharc.org.au

Support Organisations

- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre 03-9496 0200
www.spectrumvic.org.au
- Anglicare: Preston 03-8470 9999 and Broadmeadows 03-9301 5200
- Parenting Research Centre 8660 3500
- Coolaroo South Primary School
Address: Bushfield Cres, Coolaroo, Phone: 03-9309 1664
Has run a number of Positive Parenting Sessions, started a Multicultural Playgroup, Multicultural Cooking Classes and will introduce Adult English Classes early 2008.