

Tips for Helping Teens Who Are Irritable and Angry

1. As teenagers struggle to develop their own identities, they often reject or pick on adults. They may tease you. One approach is to poke fun at yourself whenever possible. This reduces the tension.
2. Calmly allow yourself not to take the bait but to keep your cool. Say something like, "You might be right. I will have to think about this one." This gives you a way out of the confrontation, and lets the teenager save face, too.
3. If a teenager tries to create a scene in public, suggest that you both deal with it later, in private. Say something like, "Let's take a break and talk about this later." If a teenager is angry, you cannot have a rational conversation, even if you try. Waiting gives the teenager time to calm down, and dealing with it in private relieves the peer pressure the teen might feel to remain defiant to impress others.
4. Don't try to get in the last word. As one principal said, "Teenagers need the last word a lot more than I do!" Let the teen mumble something under her breath.
5. Listen! Teens often admit that they just want to be heard and listened to by adults. Just by listening, you may reduce the anger.
6. Don't use sarcasm. Sarcasm can make a teenager even more angry. Adolescents who don't know you may misunderstand your sense of humor and take it the wrong way.
7. Saving face is important to all of us. Embarrassing or humiliating a child never helps them, and it could get you hurt.
8. Don't sweat the small stuff. Ignore minor misbehavior when you can.
9. Set limits, without making ultimatums or threats. Offer the teen a choice, or an "out" whenever possible. The following conversation illustrates this idea:
Don't say: "Janice, you either get to class right now or go to the office."
Do say: "Janice, it's time for sixth period. You really need to move on to class, so you won't have to stay late making up your work. How can I help you get to class on time?"
10. Take charge of yourself. If you are angry, then take some time, cool off, and collect your thoughts. You can always respond later.