

PARENTING GUIDE



embark
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



We're With You.

Parenting is a difficult job and a juggling act under any circumstances, but supporting a child experiencing mental health or substance use issues can be even more challenging.

Behavioral health problems are common in preteens, teens, and young adults and can make school, work, relationships, and everyday life more difficult:

49.5% of adolescents have a mental disorder. Of those, 22% have severe impairment.¹

13.3% of Americans aged 12-17 will have at least one major depressive episode.²

~50% of all lifetime mental disorders start by the mid-teens — 75% by the mid-20s.³

For many young people, this critical time of mental, emotional, and social development can be stressful as they begin to form who they are and envision their futures.

Given the rapid and drastic changes in daily life that the world has experienced, it is not uncommon for parents to have doubts concerning their approach.

We know you're doing your best, and we hope that this guide can give you additional tips, ideas, and tactics to help your child and family thrive.

What's Inside

In this guide, we'll discuss the roles of safety, secure relationships, communication, and consequences, along with five essential tactics for parenting a child who is experiencing mental health challenges like depression, anxiety, suicidality, substance abuse, and more. All of these elements feed and drive you and your child's ability to co-regulate — managing your feelings and emotional experiences together, in a supportive, loving way.

CONTENTS

Safety First	1
The Role of Relationship	2
Five Tactics to Try	3
Become a Better Communicator	4
No Punishment?	5
Custom, Caring Solutions	6

¹ Merikangas, et al. (2010). Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in U.S. adolescents: results from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication--Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A). *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49(10), 980-989. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2010.05.017>

² United States, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2017). 2017 NSDUH Annual National Report.

³ Kessler, et al. (2007). Age of onset of mental disorders: a review of recent literature. *Current opinion in psychiatry*, 20(4), 359-364. <https://doi.org/10.1097/YCO.0b013e32816ebc8c>

If your child and family struggle with mental health issues and need more information or support, call Embark Behavioral Health at 855-809-0409 or visit embarkbh.com.



1 Safety First

In our experience, the top four most critical safety issues parents deal with are:

TOP 4 TOUGHEST SAFETY ISSUES

- 1 Suicide Attempts or Self-harm
- 2 Substance Abuse and Addiction
- 3 Debilitating Mental or Emotional Illness
- 4 Sexual Acting-out

If your preteen, teen, or young adult is struggling with any one of these, it is time to get professional help.

Your home cannot be a treatment center, and you cannot assume the role of a therapist.



CALL the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org to chat online. All calls and chats are confidential.



BOOK an appointment with your child's physician. They may refer you to a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist. We recommend clinicians trained in Family Systems.



TALK with your teen to determine what's going on (Steps 3 & 4 in this guide will help explain how to do this in a safe, supportive manner).



VISIT PsychologyToday.com to find a therapist who has experience with people your child's age so they can treat them appropriately.



LEARN about local options for a teen or young adult specialized Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) or Therapeutic Day Program (Partial Hospitalization Program).

If your child and family are struggling with behavioral health issues and need information or support, please call us at 855-809-0409 or visit our website at embarkbh.com.



THE ROLE OF Relationship

We often tell parents “alliance before compliance” or “connection before correction” to reinforce the importance of the relationship.

Once a child’s immediate safety needs have been addressed, a second question follows quickly: “How do I regain the relationship with my child that we once had?” Parents also often wonder how to influence their children and motivate them to change for the better.

All parents should know: A secure relationship is the most effective, efficient means for creating healthy development and holistic neurobiological regulation.

This means that your child feels supported, listened to, understood, and empathized with by you, no matter what they do or how they feel. This helps build your connection, and connection is a powerful way to mitigate fear. To fortify your connection, we recommend focusing on co-regulation.

HOW TO PRACTICE CO-REGULATION WITH YOUR CHILD

Co-regulation is a reciprocal exchange of emotional, neurological, and physical safety. It is a continuous, dynamic process, and you can create it by focusing on four elements, called the CASA Developmental Framework:

CASA DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK

<p style="font-size: 2em; color: #00897b; font-weight: bold;">C</p>  <p style="font-weight: bold; margin-top: 5px;">COMMITMENT</p> <p>Demonstrating dedication to their safety, well-being, healing, and more</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; color: #00897b; font-weight: bold;">A</p>  <p style="font-weight: bold; margin-top: 5px;">ACCEPTANCE</p> <p>Showing that your child’s value to you is not contingent on their behaviors</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; color: #00897b; font-weight: bold;">S</p>  <p style="font-weight: bold; margin-top: 5px;">SECURITY</p> <p>Predictable, reliable, and consistent nurturing that considers all their needs</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; color: #00897b; font-weight: bold;">A</p>  <p style="font-weight: bold; margin-top: 5px;">ATTUNEMENT</p> <p>Empathy in action. Embracing the underlying distress creating dysfunctional behaviors</p>

When a teenager or young adult with developmental disruption (i.e., adverse experiences, grief, loss, etc.) begins to reliably experience CASA in a committed home, it emotionally, neurologically, and physically builds experiences of self-worth and value. This enables a capacity for empathy, gratitude, humility, and safe intimacy, which are essential to experiencing joy.

The following pages contain examples of how to practice these four key elements.

If your child and family are struggling with behavioral health issues and need information or support, please call us at 855-809-0409 or visit our website at embarkbh.com.



3

Five Tactics to Try

1 KEEP YOUR SIGHTS SET ON THE OTHER PERSON'S EMOTIONS.

Conflict happens when we are focused on behavior and words rather than the emotions that drive them. Reflect on what your child is “emotionally” telling you by using the words and behaviors they are displaying. This is “empathy” and takes practice and intentionality.

2 DON'T GET STUCK ON EXPECTATIONS.

First, focus on danger or threats and how you will do what is best for them, regardless of what they say. If they are emotionally hurting, their words and thoughts are not reliable or accurate. Look beyond the immediacy of their words and actions.

Don't lecture on what they “should” do or what the “expectation” is.

Use empathetic language. Say, “If I am you, I am feeling...”

Be willing to hold the magnitude of their pain.

Share their pain because part of pain is being alone in it.

3 PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING.

Shift from acting as an audience to participating in the conversation. This will encourage sharing and help them feel understood. Try these steps:

Put away distractions (phone, TV, etc.) to make your child the priority. Use your body (nodding in agreement, eye contact, etc.), along with verbal cues like “mm-hmm,” “that makes sense,” etc.

Ask open-ended questions like, “What is it like to ___?” or “How did you feel when ___?” Then summarize their most important points back to them to show you listened.

Listen with an open mind. Recognize their point of view, even if you don't agree. Wait to form opinions or judgments until you fully understand.

4 DON'T NEGOTIATE.

Follow through with what they need from you as a parent, which is consistency, reliability, and predictability, along with being an unconditionally loving person capable of empathy.

5 GET CREATIVE!

Stop doing the same thing — try new approaches to old problems. Figure out your own emotions and where your fear comes from. Decide what your bottom lines are and what you can do to best influence opportunities for your child to seek safety. How you influence is most important.

If your child and family are struggling with behavioral health issues and need information or support, please call us at 855-809-0409 or visit our website at embarkbh.com.



4 BECOME A BETTER Communicator



Even the best relationships need help with communication. This is an area in which we can all improve. Here are some bad habits that hinder communication between parents and children:

SEVEN BAD HABITS THAT BLOCK COMMUNICATION



- 1 Passing judgment on your child or their close friends
- 2 Sharing personal experiences inappropriately
- 3 Ignoring your child
- 4 Advice-giving (fixing)
- 5 Interpreting what they said incorrectly
- 6 Interrogating
- 7 Waiting to speak, rather than listening

It's not that any one of us *tries* to damage the lines of communication with our preteen, teen, or young adults on purpose. We simply slip into our old patterns of interacting. Like well-worn country roads, our tires find the ruts, and it becomes difficult to communicate differently without exerting a lot of effort to move onto smoother pavement.

THREE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

1. Listen completely.

Take time to predict your responses and feelings to all that your child is probably going to express. Ask yourself what the child feels that would cause them to behave in such a way. Think about them as doing their best, especially considering their pain, circumstances, relationships, perceptions, etc. Then, listen without judgment.

2. Reflect empathy accurately.

Reflect back in first-person language what you are hearing them tell you emotionally. Don't get stuck in analyzing details and trying to get them to cognitively "understand" how to change or fix emotions and behaviors.

3. Realize you are *always* communicating.

Parents should be aware of their body language and give consistent and caring eye contact and safe touch if possible. Be as present as possible.

If your child and family are struggling with behavioral health issues and need information or support, please call us at 855-809-0409 or visit our website at embarkbh.com.

5

No Punishment?

Parents are more successful in shaping behaviors when they focus on boundaries and consequences, not punishment.

We probably receive more questions about how to set appropriate boundaries with teenagers than any other topic. Parents worry that their consequences are too harsh or that they are not working.

We work to help parents understand what boundaries are developmentally appropriate for their child, so the parent is not too permissive or too restrictive, all the while protecting the quality of their relationship.



Use natural, logical, and relational consequences, which are experiences that teach rather than punish.

First, set up relational boundaries that reflect the family's values and strengthen your relationships' security. Then, create consequences based upon teaching positive values, and encourage your child to adopt those values into their personal system. Consequences should result in the reduction of privileges.

Privileges require emotional, physical, and relational stability, as well as responsibility.

LET'S LOOK AT THIS IN ACTION:

SCENARIO: Your teen punches a wall out of anger right before they are supposed to drive their car to an event. What are the consequences?

Natural consequence: Their hand hurts.

Relational consequence: Others may not feel very safe around them.

Logical consequence: The teen's temper is not in control, and they may endanger themselves. Therefore, they should not drive and won't get the keys until they're calm.

This logical consequence is loving because it is based in safety (what is best for the child emotionally, behaviorally, relationally, and developmentally). In this scenario, a parent might say, "I can see you're really upset right now. Let's go for a walk and talk about it."

Never...

Parents should *never* withhold the basic necessities of life from their children, such as food, sleep, water, or bathroom use.

Humiliation, being demeaning, or using fear are all *unnatural* and *illogical* consequences that communicate a lack of care for the child and their experience of suffering that is driving their dysfunctional or maladaptive behaviors. All consequences should come from a place of love.

If your child and family are struggling with behavioral health issues and need information or support, please call us at 855-809-0409 or visit our website at embarkbh.com.



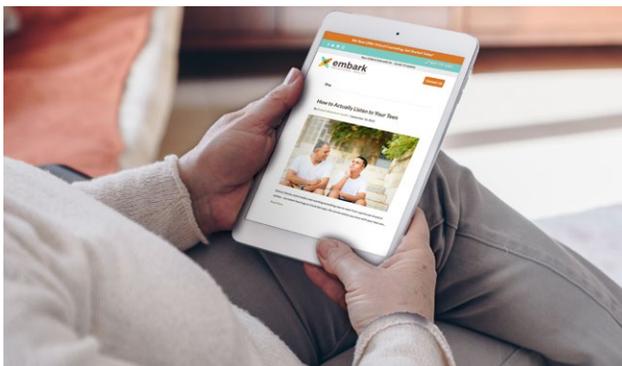
embark
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



Custom, Caring Solutions for Your Child

At Embark, we understand there's no one-size-fits-all approach to parenting or helping adolescents with emotional and behavioral issues.

Our caring, empathetic staff is here to help your entire family grow and learn together. If you could use additional support, please reach out, and we can connect you with the appropriate resources. With locations across the US and virtual counseling services, we are here to serve.



For more resources like this Parenting Guide, visit embarkbh.com/blog and subscribe to our newsletter created just for parents like you.

If your child and family are struggling with behavioral health issues and need information or support, please call us at 855-809-0409 or visit our website at embarkbh.com.

CREATE JOY. HEAL GENERATIONS.

