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Women, Couples, Teens, Groups

TIME TO THRIVE THERAPY / A FAMILY GUIDE & WORKBOOK

Growing Up, Staying Connected

An illustrated guide and workbook for parents and teens, based on concepts from *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* by Daniel J. Siegel, MD.



Plain-language science, practical conversations, and 32 original workpages.

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Start here

Your teen asks to ride home from Friday's game with a friend. You ask who's driving and when they'll be home. They hear, "You don't trust me." You want them home safely. They want a little more independence. That's the conversation to start with.

One thing I appreciate about Daniel J. Siegel's *Brainstorm* is that it asks us to look at what teens are growing into. Strong feelings can tell us what they care about. Friends can help them discover another side of themselves. Trying something new takes courage, even when it also makes it harder to think ahead.

Before your teen leaves for the game, agree on what they'll do if the ride changes. A plan that sounds easy at home can be harder to follow with friends watching. Try, "If someone else ends up driving, text me before you get in. I can come get you." Your teen has a way out without having to come up with one on the spot.

Four ideas you can use right away. Before you give advice, get curious about what's important to your teen in that moment. Plan ahead together. Offer company without pressing for details. If you don't like how you spoke, go back and say so.

If you're a teen reading this, you'll find pages for you, too. Start with a situation that feels familiar. This guide pairs ideas from Siegel's book with research, everyday examples, and things you can try.

Using the workpages. Each chapter topic has two workpages: one for parents or caregivers and one for teens. I'd start with a page that sounds like something you're dealing with now. You can do it on your own. If you're the teen, you choose what to share. Use the index on page 4 or use the two workpages right after each topic.

PARENTS AND TEENS: PICK A PLACE TO START

Name the moment
Choose one thing you get stuck on, like agreeing on a ride home.

Find your page
Use the parent or teen column in the index on page 4.

Try one change
See what helps the next time it comes up.

Parent & teen workpages

Choose what fits today. Use your own page first. Compare what you learned only if you both want to.

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Ask what would help

When your teen wants to stay home from school, find out what they're facing before you decide how to help.

It's Sunday night, and your teen says, "I don't want to go to school tomorrow. I have to give my history presentation in first period." You might ask what worries them most and offer to listen while they practice the first minute. If your teen wants to stay home because another student has been threatening them in the hallway, they need a different kind of help. Listen to what happened and work with the school on a plan to keep them safe.

Support can come from family, friends, school, or someone else your teen trusts. A conversation, ride, or private message can all help. Ask whether it helped rather than assuming it did.

In my review of adolescent depression research, whether teens could count on support and how they experienced it mattered. A caring conversation is one place to start. Ongoing distress deserves professional attention.

Ask before you offer a solution

Try, "What are you most worried will happen at school tomorrow?" Once you know what's going on, you can decide together what would help.

Jewett (2026), pp. 90–94, 181–186, 196–210. Full citation and review scope are in the back.

The Essence of Adolescence

Your teen tries out for a team without knowing anyone there. They tell a friend, “I don’t see it that way,” and find out the friendship can handle it. Those are two ways teens begin to discover what they care about and who they want to be. In *Brainstorm*, Daniel J. Siegel, MD, gives us a way to remember four changes you may see along the way: **ES + SE + N + CE = ESSENCE.** That’s emotional spark, social engagement, novelty-seeking, and creative exploration. Siegel’s introduction to the ESSENCE framework



ES + SE + N + CE = ESSENCE

ES
Emotional Spark
Ask what feels important.

SE
Social Engagement
Notice where you feel you belong.

N
Novelty-seeking
Find a safer way to try it.

CE
Creative Exploration
Test one small idea.

Go to Science in Plain English · 7

Why the fun can feel bigger than the risk



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Dopamine helps us notice and go after rewards. In *Brainstorm*, Daniel Siegel describes a pattern that may help explain why familiar things can feel less exciting to teens: dopamine may run lower at rest and rise more sharply with new experiences. Siegel sees a purpose in that pull. It gets teens out into the world to meet people, try things, and learn what they can do on their own. Siegel on dopamine

That pull can also make the thrill feel more important than the risk. The prefrontal cortex, the part of the frontal lobe that helps us pause and weigh consequences, is still developing. In a driving-game study, teens took more chances when friends watched. The study measured activity in the brain's reward circuits, not dopamine itself. Driving-game study · Reward study

How to use this. If your teen wants to join a plan that feels risky, ask which part they most want: time with friends, the challenge, or something new. Look for a safer way they can still get that part.

BEFORE FRIENDS ARE WAITING FOR AN ANSWER

Spot the pull

"I want to stay with my friends."

Check the ride

"Who's driving us home?"

Save a backup

"If the plan changes, I'll text the adult we picked."

Read the first topic · 10 Find the source and study notes

Trying something new with a friend

Think about walking into a room where you don’t know anyone. Having one familiar face there can make it easier to walk in and find out if you like what’s happening.

Your teen wants to help build the sets for the school play. At dinner, they say they might skip the first meeting because they don’t know anyone on stage crew. They ask a friend to meet them outside the auditorium. Inside, the crew leader shows them how to paint a piece of scenery. By the end of the meeting, your teen is thinking about coming back next week.

For parents: Find out what’s holding them back before offering help. “Do you want help finding out what happens at the first meeting, or would it help to walk in with someone you know?” Let your teen choose what would help.

For teens: Ask someone to meet you at the door. Once you’re inside, try one job that interests you. Afterward, ask yourself whether you’d like to come back, even if your friend doesn’t.

A text you can send to a friend

“I want to check out stage crew after school. Can you meet me outside the auditorium at three and walk in with me?”

Jewett (2026), Chapter 2, printed pp. 32–34, 43–49, 63–67. See de Moor et al. (2023), Braams & Krabbendam (2022), and Letkiewicz et al. (2023).

What is making it hard to get help?

If a teen keeps missing something they chose, find out whether the plan works before reminding them again.

Your teen signed up for after-school math help but hasn't gone. You ask, "What happens when you try to stay?" They tell you their bus leaves half an hour before the session ends. They need a way home, not another reminder.

For parents: Ask whether they'd rather get a ride that day or ask about help at lunch. If they want you to contact the teacher, agree on what's okay to say first.

Ask for a change that would work

For teens: "My bus leaves before math help ends. Is there a day I can come at lunch?" Start with the scheduling problem. You don't need to explain your grades.

Jewett (2026), Chapter 2, pp. 84–86 and 88–90 (printed pages); literature discussed includes Lenoir & Wong (2023), Nadeem & Van Meter (2023), and Machado-Kayzuka et al. (2024). The school example is fictional.

Emotional spark: Hear what's behind the snap

You ask your teen to put their phone away for dinner. "Can you just leave me alone?" they snap. It's hard to hear anything besides the way they said it. Then you find out their closest friend just texted that they're moving away. Now you understand why putting the phone down felt so hard.

Siegel calls the intensity teens can bring to things they care about *emotional spark*. Knowing what happened can change what you do first. You may want to give your teen a minute to finish that text, then talk about how to ask for time without snapping. You can do both.

What it could sound like. "Did something just happen?" If they tell you about the move, try: "Oh, that's hard news. Go ahead and finish the text. Come find me when you're ready." Later: "I get why you wanted a minute. Next time, can you tell me you need one?"

For parents: When a small request gets a bigger reaction than you expected, ask once what happened. If your teen isn't ready to talk, try, "Okay. I'll check in after dinner." Following through lets them know they can tell you later if they want to.

For teens: If something just happened and you don't want to explain yet, try: "I got a text I need to answer. Can I have five minutes?" Giving a time helps the other person understand what you're asking for.

WHEN YOUR TEEN SNAPS ABOUT PUTTING THE PHONE DOWN

Find out what happened

"Did something happen just now?"

Make room for the feeling

"That's hard news. Go ahead and finish the text."

Come back to the request

"Next time, tell me you need a minute."

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

What Did This Moment Mean to Them?

WHEN TO USE IT After a small disappointment comes out as a sharp reply.

WHY IT HELPS Finding out what hurt helps you respond without letting insults slide.

START HERE

Your teen doesn’t make the team and snaps when you ask about tryouts. Use that scene or choose a recent one.

1 Separate facts from guesses

Write what they said or did, then what you thought it meant.

What I saw	What I guessed

2 Open without fixing

Try, “You worked hard for this. Did I get that right? Want company, or some time alone?” Use your own words.

Say it back	Check it	Offer help

3 Revisit the remark

If something hurtful was said, decide when to come back to it without restarting the whole story.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Find out what happened before you offer a fix.

Read the matching concept: p. 10

Show the Part They Didn’t See

WHEN TO USE IT When someone noticed your reaction but missed what happened first.

WHY IT HELPS A short explanation can help you get what you need without telling them everything.

START HERE

Imagine you didn’t make a team and snapped when someone asked about it. You can use a made-up moment and keep it private.

1 Show both sides

Write or draw what they noticed and the part they didn’t know.

What they saw	What they missed

2 What would help?

Put three options in order: time alone, quiet company, or help deciding what to do. Swap any that don’t fit.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

3 Ask for just that

Try, “Could you sit with me for a minute before asking what happened?” Make it sound like you.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Keep a line you could use later, if you want to.

Read the matching concept: p. 10

Social engagement: Learn what the friendship offers

Summary. With friends, teens get to find out what it's like to belong somewhere on their own terms. It can also feel harder to disagree when they're worried about getting left out.

Why it matters. When you know what matters about a particular plan, you can leave room for friendship without dropping a commitment your teen has already made.

What you might see. Your teen wants to go to a movie during Grandma's birthday lunch. What they haven't told you is that this is the first time someone in the group has invited them along. Now you have a better idea of why "Just go next time" didn't land.

What to try. Ask what part of the outing matters most, then work from the parts of the day that can move. The birthday lunch stays. A later showing, meeting friends after the movie, or changing who gives them a ride may leave room for both. Agree on when and how your teen will get home.

What it could sound like. "You've been hoping they'd invite you. I see why you want to go. We do need to be at lunch for Grandma's birthday. What time is the next showing?"

For parents: On an ordinary drive or walk, ask, "Who do you feel most like yourself around lately?" Just listen. You'll learn what your teen values in a friendship without turning the conversation into an evaluation of their friends.

For teens: When two plans overlap, tell your friends which part you can make: "I can't do the two o'clock movie. Is anyone up for the four o'clock one?" That gives people an option instead of leaving them to guess whether you're interested.

MAKE ROOM FOR THE MOVIE AND THE FAMILY LUNCH

Hear why it matters

"It's the first time they asked me to go."

Keep the commitment

"Grandma's birthday lunch is at noon."

Find another showing

"Could you make the later movie? Who can drive?"

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Make Room for Both Plans

WHEN TO USE IT Before a friend’s plan and a family commitment land at the same time.

WHY IT HELPS Knowing what each person would hate to miss gives you more choices than picking a winner.

START HERE

Your teen wants to see a friend’s Saturday game. Your family is meeting for lunch. Use those plans or choose your own.

1 Lay out the day

Mark the start and end of both plans on one timeline. Leave room for travel.

2 Find what matters

Write what each person cares about. Put a question mark beside anything you haven’t asked.

What they’d miss	What matters at home

3 Build a proposal

Name what can stay, what might shift, and what needs a yes from someone else.

Keep	Move	Confirm

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Ask what your teen would change before you settle the plan.

Read the matching concept: p. 13

Your People, Your Call

WHEN TO USE IT Before a hangout where you might go along with something you don’t want.

WHY IT HELPS Telling one person ahead of time makes it easier to stick with your choice.

START HERE

Imagine you want to see the movie but go home afterward. Friends may want to keep hanging out. This page can stay private.

1 Draw who helps

Put yourself in the middle. Add a friend who listens, someone who makes plans easier, or someone who can help you leave.

2 Decide what’s worth it

Write what you’re looking forward to and what you don’t want to get talked into.

What I want	What I’ll skip

3 Text one person

Try, “I’m in for the movie, but I’m going home after. Can you help me stick to that?” Make it yours.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

If you like, send the text before the hangout starts.

Read the matching concept: p. 13

Why being left out at lunch can hurt

Your teen's closest friend gets moved to a different lunch period. The next day, your teen carries their tray over to a table with kids from science class. No one looks up or moves a backpack, so they eat alone. On the way home they say, "I felt like nobody wanted me there."

What's happening in the teen brain. During adolescence, the brain becomes more tuned in to how peers see us. That's peer appraisal. In one study, teens felt more self-conscious than children or adults when they thought another young person could see them on camera. A region near the front of the brain that helps us think about how others see us was also more active.

In another study, teens who got messages that other kids wanted to meet them showed a stronger response in some brain areas involved in emotion and reward than when they got rejecting messages. Peer validation can matter for the same reason: when a friend says, "I get why that felt awkward," it tells your teen how they felt makes sense. Being left out can hit hard, especially when they're still figuring out where they belong.

For parents: Start with "That sounds lonely. What happened when you got to the table?" Hear the story before deciding whether it was a misunderstanding. If classmates are repeatedly targeting or excluding your teen, help them talk with a trusted adult at school.

For teens: If you want to try sitting with someone tomorrow, ask before lunch: "Hey, can I sit with you today?" Then you don't have to figure out where to go while you're carrying your tray.

Help your teen make a plan before lunch

After you've listened, ask, "Do you want me to just listen, or would it help to think of one person you could text before lunch tomorrow?"

Jewett (2026), Chapter 2, pp. 36–39, 44–47, 65–69, 93; Chapter 4, pp. 154–167. See Somerville et al. (2013) and Guyer et al. (2012).

Brain-imaging study: What it feels like to be watched by a peer

Study of responses to peer acceptance and rejection

Novelty-seeking: Look for a safer way to try something new

Summary. Wanting to try something unfamiliar can help teens find new interests and build confidence. The thrill of doing it for the first time can be part of the appeal.

Why it matters. If you know which part they're excited about, you have a better chance of offering an alternative they'd actually want to try.

What you might see. After a beginner climbing class, your teen wants to climb outdoors with friends who haven't done it before. You want to know if a trained guide will be there to set up the ropes and help everyone climb safely. Your teen is already picturing reaching the top with their friends.

What to try. Ask what they're most looking forward to: being outside, climbing a harder route, or going with those friends. Keep the limit about going without a qualified guide. If going together is the part they care about, look for a guided group class they can all take.

What it could sound like. "I can see why you want to try it outside. I'm comfortable with you going with a qualified guide. Should we see whether there's a class you and your friends could do together?"

For parents: Ask, "What are you most looking forward to about climbing outside?" If they say it's going with Maya, look together for a guided beginner class they can both take.

For teens: Tell your parent what you want: "I want to try climbing on real rock with Maya." Then ask, "Could we look for an outdoor class we can take together?"

IF YOUR TEEN WANTS TO CLIMB OUTSIDE WITH FRIENDS

Ask what they want

"What are you most looking forward to about climbing outside?"

Say what needs to be safe

"I'm comfortable with you going with a qualified guide."

Suggest a class together

Look for a group class they'd want to try.

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Keep the Adventure, Change the Plan

WHEN TO USE IT When your teen suggests something exciting that you're not sure is safe.

WHY IT HELPS You can keep the part they care about without agreeing to the part that worries you.

START HERE

Your teen wants to try a bike trail with friends. You're worried because nobody knows the route. Adapt the example if you like.

1 Get specific

Ask what appeals to them. Name the specific safety concern, not what you think it says about them.

What they want	What I need to check

2 Find three alternatives

List three ways to keep the best part, like trying a familiar route or doing a daylight ride first.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

3 Check one option

Pick one option and write what needs to be in place before it's a yes.

Who can help	Safety limit	What to confirm

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Offer one version you can actually agree to, then ask what it still gives them.

Read the matching concept: p. 17

Make the New Thing Worth Trying

WHEN TO USE IT Before trying something new with a group that may move faster than you want.

WHY IT HELPS Knowing what you want from it makes it easier to change the plan without giving up the fun.

START HERE

Imagine friends want to bike a trail you've never tried. What sounds good to you, and what would you want to know first?

1 Find the best part

Rank three things that draw you in, like being with friends, learning a skill, or trying a route on your own.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

2 Compare the plans

Compare the first idea with a smaller try. Write what you'd still get out of each.

First plan	Another way

3 Decide when to stop

Name one thing that would make you stop or head home and who you'd contact if it happened.

_____

_____

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Pitch the version you actually want to try.

Read the matching concept: p. 17

Creative exploration: Give the idea a small place to happen

Summary. Teens start questioning things they've always done and imagining what else they could do. Trying a new idea can tell them something about what they enjoy.

Why it matters. A small trial lets your teen find out whether they like the actual work before they decide what to give up for it.

What you might see. Your teen wants to quit a club they've been in for years to make short films with a friend. You're wondering who'll finish the editing. They already have three ideas for the first scene.

What to try. Set aside one afternoon for the first film. Make a plan to keep any promise they've already made to the club. Once they've shot and edited something short, ask what was fun and what took longer than they expected. Then revisit the club decision.

What it could sound like. "What could you and Maya film in an afternoon? You've already promised to help at the club event. Let's find a day to try filming around that."

For parents: When a new idea catches you off guard, ask, "What would a first try look like?" You don't need to have an opinion about the whole plan before you hear the answer.

For teens: Pick one version you can finish this week: one scene on your phone, for instance. Afterward, jot down what you'd want to do again and what you'd change. Use what you learned to decide how much time to give it next week.

PARENTS AND TEENS: TRY THE NEW IDEA BEFORE DECIDING

Make one thing

Film a one-minute scene this weekend.

Keep one promise

Show up for the club event you agreed to help with.

Talk after the trial

What did you like? Do you want to do it again?

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Back the First Try, Not the Whole Idea

WHEN TO USE IT When a new idea could mean dropping something your teen already agreed to do.

WHY IT HELPS A small trial gives you both more to go on before changing an ongoing commitment.

START HERE

Your teen wants to make short films instead of going to their weekly class. Start with what they might try this weekend.

1 Keep what's promised

Write the commitment that still stands and one small part of the new idea they can try without dropping it.

Already promised	Try it now

2 Sketch the first try

Draw a quick plan for where they'll work, what they need, and which piece they want to do on their own.

3 Check in afterward

Write one offer of help and one question, like "What part would you do again?"

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

After the trial, let your teen say what they found out before you offer an opinion.

Read the matching concept: p. 20

Build a Tiny Version

WHEN TO USE IT When you're excited by an idea but don't want to sign up, quit something, or spend money yet.

WHY IT HELPS Trying one small piece can show you whether you like doing it, not just thinking about it.

START HERE

Want to make a film? Try filming one 30-second scene. Or choose another idea you can test in an afternoon.

1 Set a stopping point

Describe what you'll start with, what you'll try, and what counts as enough for today.

Start	Try	Stop here

2 Keep it small

Pick one thing to skip for now and one thing you'll need for the small version.

Leave out	Borrow or find

3 See what you liked

Afterward, write what you'd want to repeat. "I liked filming, but not editing" is a useful answer.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Decide whether to try again, make one change, or leave it there.

Read the matching concept: p. 20

Looking older and being ready are different

Summary. Hormones start many of the physical changes of puberty. The skills that go with more independence, like finding a new route or handling a change of plans, grow with experience. A growth spurt doesn't tell you what your teen has had a chance to practice.

Why it matters. When you separate what your teen can already do from what they haven't practiced, you can give them room to try without asking them to figure everything out on the spot.

What you might see. Your teen has the train times and knows where to change lines. When you ask how they'd get home if the last train were canceled, they haven't thought about it. That tells you where they might need help.

For parents: Let them show you the route they planned before you offer a backup. Then ask, "If the last train gets canceled, where could you wait and who could you call?" Agree on someone who can actually help that day.

For teens: If you're ready for part of a plan, say which part and ask for help with the rest: "I can get us there and back if the trains are running. Can we make a backup plan in case they aren't?" That lets you keep responsibility for the part you know.

IF YOUR TEEN IS TAKING THE TRAIN HOME

Let them show you the route

Ask which train they'll take and where they'll change.

Pick somewhere safe to wait

Find a staffed place nearby in case a train is canceled.

Check who can help

Agree on an adult who can answer or pick them up.

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Hand Over One Piece at a Time

WHEN TO USE IT Before your teen takes on a new job, such as getting to an appointment.

WHY IT HELPS You can give them something real to do without asking them to manage every surprise alone.

START HERE

Your teen wants to get to an appointment by bus. Start with which steps they've done before.

1 Check what they've practiced

Write one step they've done, like checking the schedule, and one they haven't, like making the transfer.

Already handled	Still new

2 Plan the handoff

Choose their next step, one thing to rehearse, and a fallback if the bus is missed.

They'll handle	Try together	Backup

3 Ask after the trip

Write a question that leaves room for a real answer: "Where did you want more help, if anywhere?"

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

After one trip, decide together what help to keep or change.

Read the matching concept: p. 23

Ask for Backup Without Handing It Over

WHEN TO USE IT Before doing something on your own, like taking a bus route you don’t know yet.

WHY IT HELPS A fallback gives you room to try it without needing to solve every surprise by yourself.

START HERE

Imagine taking the bus to an appointment or a friend’s house. You can use a made-up route.

1 Map both routes

Write or sketch the route, then what you’d do if you missed the transfer.

My plan	If it changes

2 What I know already

Name one step you’ve practiced and one that you’d like to check with someone first.

3 Make a backup card

Draft the message you’d send if your plan changed. Ask only for the help you’d need.

Who to contact	What I’d say	Help I want

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Try: “I can get to the stop. Can you help me check which bus I take from there?”

Read the matching concept: p. 23

What independence looks like in your family

Families differ in how they share responsibilities and decisions. Growing up can mean taking more responsibility for others as well as making more choices for yourself.

A teen wants to go to art club on Thursday. They normally pick up their younger brother that afternoon. The teen wants to try something they chose. The parent needs to know someone will be there for pickup. Both concerns are real.

For parents: Say what needs to happen without turning it into a test of loyalty. “Your brother needs a ride. Let’s work out who can do Thursday.”

For teens: Ask for one change you want. “Can I try art club once? I can still do pickup the other days.”

Try the plan once

Agree on who will handle pickup. After Thursday, ask what worked and whether the plan is worth repeating.

Jewett (2026), Chapter 2, printed pp. 28–35, 42–43. See Sawyer et al. (2018) and discussion of cultural variability. Scenario is fictional.

Mindsight: Check the story you just told yourself

Summary. Siegel uses *mindsight* to describe noticing what's going on inside you and wondering what might be going on for someone else. You can notice what you're assuming and give the other person a chance to tell you.

Why it matters. Checking what someone meant can save you from carrying an argument into the next conversation that neither of you was trying to have.

What you might see. After a tense morning, a parent texts, "Are we okay?" Their teen answers "fine." The parent reads it as irritation. The teen is in a crowded school hallway and doesn't want to talk about the morning in front of friends.

For parents: Try it when you're together and have time to hear the answer. Name what you saw and what you made of it: "When I saw 'fine,' I wondered if you were still upset. Did I read that right?" Leave room to hear that you didn't.

For teens: If someone misreads you and you want to clear it up, name what was happening at the time: "I wanted to talk about it, just not in the hallway. Do you have a minute now?" You can correct the misunderstanding without rehashing every detail.

WHEN YOU'RE NOT SURE WHAT "FINE" MEANT

Notice the words

Your teen texted "fine" after a tense morning.

Ask about your guess

"I wondered if you were still upset. Did I read that right?"

Hear their side

They may have been somewhere they didn't want to talk.

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

What Did I See, and What Did I Decide It Meant?

WHEN TO USE IT When a one-word text sounds rude and you're about to reply.

WHY IT HELPS If you check what they meant, you can respond to what happened instead of arguing with your first guess.

START HERE

You ask whether they'll be home for dinner and get "fine." Use that text or choose one that caught you wrong.

1 Separate the words from the tone

Copy the words they sent, then write the tone or meaning you added.

What came in	What I heard in it

2 What was I worried about?

Finish: "I got tense because I thought ___."

3 Three other possibilities

List other reasons they might have answered that way. Include one that isn't about you.

1.
2.
3.

4 Check your read

Draft a question: "I wasn't sure what 'fine' meant. Are you planning to eat with us?"

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Wait for the answer before writing your next message.

Read the matching concept: p. 27

The Scene From Both Sides

WHEN TO USE IT When someone gets the wrong idea from a text, a look, or silence.

WHY IT HELPS You can clear up one part without defending everything you did.

START HERE

Imagine you text “fine” from a noisy hall and someone takes it as anger. Use that scene or keep your own private.

1 Draw what each person knew

Sketch two speech or thought bubbles: what you meant and what you think they heard.

2 Check the evidence

Separate what they actually said or did from what you assumed they thought of you.

What they did	What I guessed

3 Clear up one thing

Try, “I meant I could make dinner. I was trying to text fast in the hall.” Write what fits your scene.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Use the line only if you want to revisit the mix-up.

Read the matching concept: p. 27

Your Brain

Your teen may think through a decision at home and make a different choice with friends waiting for an answer. The situation matters, and brain development is one piece of why rewards and feelings can carry different weight in the moment. Talking through a real example can help you and your teen plan for the hard part before it happens. Brain development alone can’t tell you why a particular teen made a particular choice. NIMH: The Teen Brain



BEFORE THE GAME, PLAN WHAT TO DO IF THE RIDE CHANGES

Pick a meeting spot

“I’ll pick you up at the main gate.”

Try a line for friends

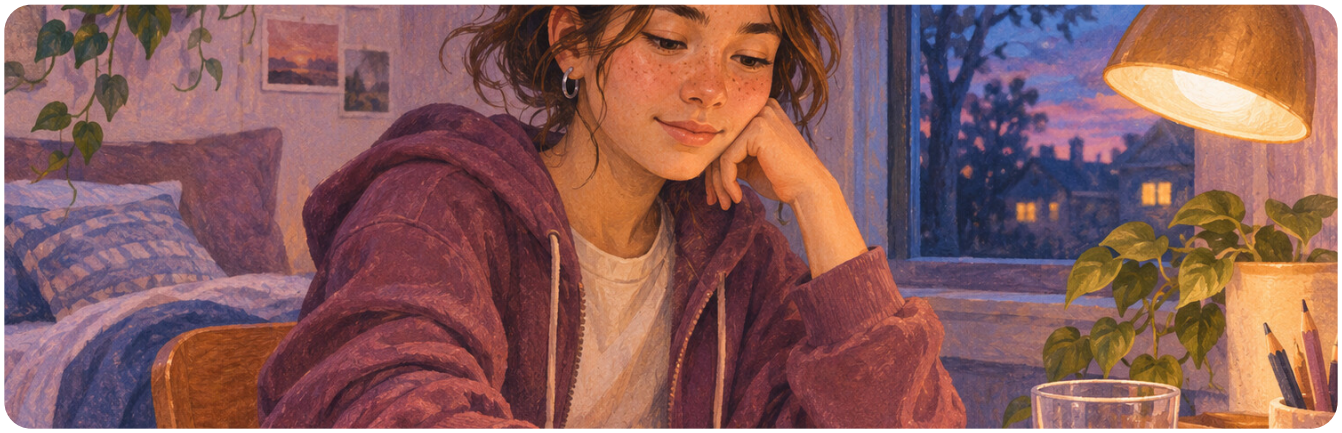
“Go ahead. I’m staying here for my ride.”

Save a backup

“If I don’t answer, call Aunt Jo. She’s agreed.”

Go to Science in Plain English · 31

Why it’s harder to think ahead on some days



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

The prefrontal cortex, just behind your forehead, helps you hold a plan in mind, weigh options, and pause before you act. It’s part of the frontal lobe and is among the areas that keep developing into young adulthood. Brain connections are changing at the same time. Some are reorganized, and myelin, a fatty coating around nerve fibers, helps messages travel faster. Over time, different areas get better at working together. That helps a teen keep a plan in mind even when something unexpected happens.

Sleep matters here, too. Many teens’ bodies release melatonin, the hormone that helps time sleep, later at night. School may still start early. When you’re short on sleep, it’s harder to focus or stop and think. That’s one reason a plan that makes sense at breakfast can feel out of reach late at night. NIMH: The Teen Brain

How to use this. If homework is going nowhere after a short night, ask which part feels hardest. Read the first question together, or choose a time after a break to return to it.

WHEN HOMEWORK STALLS AFTER A SHORT NIGHT

Check what’s hard

“Are the directions confusing, or are you too tired?”

Shrink the first step

“Let’s read just the first question together.”

Pick a time to return

“I’ll take a break and try one question after dinner.”

Read the first topic · 33 Find the source and study notes

Plan what you'll say before someone's waiting

It's easier to think through a choice before friends are waiting for an answer.

After a football game, someone says, "My brother can take us for pizza." Everyone's getting in. Your teen already has a ride and has to decide quickly whether to change plans, how to get home, and what to say to their friends.

Planning and weighing consequences continue developing through adolescence. Friends' reactions and a reward that's right in front of us can carry extra weight. A plan and one short line mean less to figure out on the spot.

For parents: Name who can pick them up and what to do if that person doesn't answer. **For teens:** Say the line out loud now, when no one is waiting.

Practice the words and the backup

"Go ahead. My ride's coming." If the pickup plan falls through, text your backup: "I'm at the main gate. Can you come?"

Jewett (2026), Chapter 2, printed pp. 35–41, 44. See Guyer et al. (2023) and Peters & Naneix (2022).

Risk and reward: Make room for what's hard to see in the moment

Summary. A chance to do something fun with friends can feel so important in the moment that a concern you talked through at home feels less pressing.

Why it matters. It's easier to fall back on a plan you've rehearsed than to work out what to say with three people waiting for you to get in the car.

What you might see. Your teen's friends want to leave a party for another one across town. Your teen wants to go; no one's sure who'll drive them home. Siegel uses *hyperrationality* to describe a decision in which a benefit gets so much attention that other considerations get less. Dopamine is involved in how the brain learns about and pursues rewards. The chance to be with friends can feel worth a lot right then, even to a teen who knows the ride is uncertain. Chein and colleagues, original experiment

What to try. Talk it through before the party. Ask, "What will you do if people want to leave and nobody can tell you how you'll get home?" Agree on a text to send, a safe place to wait, and an adult who confirms they can pick your teen up if you can't.

What it could sound like. "You can text me your location and the word 'ride.' I'll help you get home first. We can talk about what happened later."

For parents: Before your teen leaves, have them try out one line they'd actually say to a friend. Check that they have the backup adult's number and that the adult will be reachable.

For teens: Pick words that feel like yours: "I'm staying here. I've already got a ride." Save the pickup number and decide where you'd wait, so you don't have to figure out all three things at once.

IF FRIENDS LEAVE FOR A SECOND PARTY

Notice the change

"I don't know who's driving us home."

Say what you'll do

"I'm staying here. I've already got a ride."

Send your location

"I'm by the lit front entrance. Can you pick me up?"

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Practice the Plan Before the Plans Change

WHEN TO USE IT Before an outing where the group might change locations or switch rides.

WHY IT HELPS A clear signal and a confirmed backup leave less to work out while your teen is on the spot.

START HERE

Your teen plans to go to one party. Friends may head to another place afterward. Ask what your teen wants from the night.

1 Name the turning point

Write what they're looking forward to and one change that would make the original plan stop working.

What they want	What could change

2 Make the pickup plan

Agree on the text and where your teen can safely wait. Confirm someone else can go if you can't.

Signal	Pickup spot	Backup adult

3 Write your first reply

Try, "I got your text. Wait at the safe spot we picked; I'll tell you who's coming." Use a place and promise that fit.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Have your teen send the practice text once, and reply as you would on the night.

Read the matching concept: p. 33

Save an Exit Before You Need It

WHEN TO USE IT Before friends might ask you to head somewhere you didn't plan to go.

WHY IT HELPS A line to say and a ride you can call make it easier to leave without explaining yourself to the group.

START HERE

You want to stay with your friends, but they're moving to a second party and you don't know how you'd get home.

1 Think past the invitation

Write what makes you want to go, then what you'd want to confirm before getting in a car.

What looks fun	What I need to know

2 Choose a way out

Choose your exit line, a safe place to wait, and an adult who's agreed to help.

Say to friends	Wait here	Call or text

3 Draft the text

Include where you are and what you need: "Can you pick me up? I'm inside the lobby."

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Save the number and your message before you go out. You don't have to show anyone this page.

Read the matching concept: p. 33

Brain remodeling and strong feelings: Pause with a way back

Summary. A strong feeling can land before you've decided how to respond. The brain systems that help you pause and choose what to do are still developing during the teen years.

Why it matters. When both of you are talking over each other, a break gives you time to get back to the conversation you meant to have. Saying when you'll return keeps the other person from wondering whether you're done talking altogether.

What you might see. You ask about one overdue assignment. Your teen interrupts, and you start listing everything that went wrong last semester. You're both losing track of the one assignment. The amygdala helps flag emotionally important information. The prefrontal cortex, just behind the forehead, helps you keep track of what's happening and choose how to respond. Connections between these areas change during development. One study found that teens, as a group, showed a stronger initial amygdala response to emotional faces than children or adults. That finding offers one piece of context for why managing big feelings can be hard; it can't tell you what's happening in your teen in that moment. Study of emotion and the teen brain

What to try. If you hear yourself getting louder, pause and say when you'll come back. When you do, apologize for raising your voice if you did, and return to the assignment: "Which part is due first?"

What it could sound like. "I'm getting loud. I'm going to take ten minutes. I'll meet you back here at seven so we can figure out what needs to happen tonight."

For parents: Pick a time and place you can keep. If you need longer, let your teen know before they're left waiting. Coming back when you said you would is what makes it easier to agree to a pause next time.

For teens: Notice the first clue you need a break, like talking faster or clenching your hands. Try: "I want to answer. Can I have ten minutes and come find you?" Give a time you can keep, so you both know how you'll start again.

HOW TO COME BACK TO THE OVERDUE ASSIGNMENT

Notice your voice

"I'm getting loud, and we're losing track of what's due."

Say when you'll come back

"I need ten minutes. I'll meet you here at seven."

Follow through

"I'm sorry I yelled. What's due first?"

A Pause With a Time to Come Back

WHEN TO USE IT Before a conversation that tends to get heated, like asking about missing homework.

WHY IT HELPS A promised return tells your teen you're taking time to listen, not dropping the conversation.

START HERE

Think of an ordinary topic that gets you both talking louder or faster. Decide what you'll do first.

1 Notice your own cue

Write the first thing you do when the talk heats up, like repeating the same question louder.

2 Set a return time

Write what you'll say, when you'll return, and where you'll find them.

My pause line	Return time	Meet here

3 Keep the restart short

If you wish you'd spoken differently, name that first. Then ask one question about what needs doing tonight.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Go back when you said you would. If you need longer, tell them before the agreed time.

Read the matching concept: p. 36

I Need a Minute. I’m Not Done Talking.

WHEN TO USE IT When you’re both talking and you can’t think of what you want to say.

WHY IT HELPS Taking a short break can give you a chance to find your words and come back to the same issue.

START HERE

Imagine someone asks about missing homework after a long day. Use a real or made-up moment, and keep this page private if you want.

1 Spot your first sign

Draw or label something you notice early, like a tight jaw or talking faster than you meant to.

2 Make a pause plan

Try, “I want to answer, but I need ten minutes.” Plan what you’ll do and when you can come back.

What I’ll say	On the break	Time to try again

3 The first line back

Finish, “The one thing I wanted you to hear was ___.”

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Try saying your pause line once when things are calm so it sounds like you.

Read the matching concept: p. 36

Hear what hurt before offering a fix

When something stings, a teen may want you to understand what happened before helping them decide what to do.

Your teen misses a shot in a close game and tells you on the ride home, “I’m quitting.” Rather than “It was only one game,” try: “Was the hard part missing the shot, or having everyone see it?” Let them correct you.

The amygdala helps register what matters, and the prefrontal cortex helps weigh what to do. Neither works alone. Stress and sleep can affect how easy it is to think clearly. A quiet ride can give everyone a little room. If someone is being hurtful, stop the behavior without arguing over the feeling.

For teens: If talking right now would make it worse, try: “I need a few minutes. Can you check on me later?”

Offer two options

“Want me to listen or would you rather have a quiet ride?” If they choose quiet, you can check in later.

Jewett (2026), Chapter 2, printed pp. 42–46, 63–64. See Perica & Luna (2023) and Purswell (2025).

Hare and colleagues: brain activity during an emotional task

Your Attachments

Section summary: Your teen may want to do more on their own and still need you when something goes wrong. Siegel describes both as part of a secure relationship. Feeling secure grows out of everyday moments: someone notices when you're struggling, helps you feel safe, and offers comfort you can count on. If you're the parent, it may help to notice what you learned about asking for help when you were young. If you're the teen, needing some backup doesn't take away from what you can do on your own.



HOW TO BE THERE WHILE THEY TRY MORE ON THEIR OWN

Offer a place to turn

"You can call me if you need help."

Give them a part to handle

"Which part do you want to do yourself?"

Welcome them back

"I'm glad you told me. What would help now?"

Go to Science in Plain English · 41

What warmth from a parent can look like



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Cortisol is one hormone involved in how your body responds to stress. It normally changes over the day. In a daily-life study, researchers asked teens about stress and feelings, and measured cortisol in their saliva. On days that were less stressful than usual, teens who reported more parental warmth tended to report fewer negative feelings. The researchers also found differences in how cortisol shifted across the day. These findings tell us what was linked, rather than what caused the difference.

At home, warmth can be as ordinary as listening without jumping in or offering to make a snack together. If your teen would rather talk to a friend first, you can still make it clear you're there when they want you. Parental warmth and daily stress study

How to use this. When your teen comes home quiet, offer something they can accept without explaining themselves: "I'm making a snack if you want to join me." Leave the choice with them.

IF THEY DON'T WANT TO REHASH A HARD DAY

Notice

They walk in quiet and head to their room.

Offer company

"I'm making a snack if you want to join me."

Leave the choice with them

They can say no and come find you later.

Read the first topic · 42 Find the source and study notes

Offer a place to turn and room to try

Summary: Siegel calls this being both a safe harbor and a launching pad. A teen can venture farther when they know where to turn if they need help.

Why it matters: It's easier to work out what kind of help would be useful before your teen is homesick, embarrassed, or deciding whether to leave.

What it looks like: Your teen was excited to sign up for an overnight school trip. At bedtime they ask whether it's too late to back out. They want to go with their friends; they're also picturing themselves awake in an unfamiliar room, not knowing what to do.

For parents: Ask what part they're worried about before you try to talk them into going. "If you text me that you're homesick, do you want me to listen first or help you figure out who to talk to there?" If they want a backup, find out together which adult on the trip they can reach at night.

For teens: Tell your parent what would help you give it a try. "I still want to go. Can we find out who I can talk to if I get homesick? If I text you, remind me who it is before we decide whether I should come home."

PLAN SUPPORT FOR THE OVERNIGHT TRIP

Name both feelings

"You want to go, and you're worried you'll get homesick."

Choose a backup

Decide which adult on the trip they can go to for help.

Let your teen try

Agree on when to step in rather than calling to check all night.

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Make a Backup Plan Without Taking Over

WHEN TO USE IT Before an overnight trip or another first on their own.

WHY IT HELPS Knowing who can help lets your teen try without having to handle every surprise alone.

START HERE

Picture your teen signing up for an overnight trip, then worrying they might want to come home. Use that trip or something coming up.

1 Decide who handles what

Write one thing your teen wants to handle and one kind of backup you can offer.

Their decision	Help I can offer

2 Try the first reply

Your teen texts “I want to come home.” Write your first reply. Ask what’s happening before you decide what to do.

3 Check what feels useful

Write one question to check whether they want you to listen or help them find the adult in charge.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Before they go, check that the adult they’ve chosen knows how to help.

Read the matching concept: p. 42

Try It With a Backup Plan

WHEN TO USE IT Before a new outing, trip, or tryout that you want to do but feel nervous about.

WHY IT HELPS Picking a person to ask ahead of time gives you options if things don't go the way you expect.

START HERE

Imagine you're on an overnight trip and miss home, or choose another first you're thinking about. This page can stay private.

1 Draw the two routes

Sketch where you'll be and add two routes: what you'll try first, and where or to whom you'll go if you need help.

2 Put your help in order

Rank three options, like texting home, talking to the trip leader, or asking a friend to sit with you.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

3 Sendable in one line

Write the short text you'd actually send, like "Can you remind me who I can talk to here?"

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

If you want to use this plan, check that your backup person will be reachable.

Read the matching concept: p. 42

Four kinds of support

If your teen says, “I didn’t ask you to fix it,” they may still want help. They’re telling you the advice isn’t what they need right now. I use James S. House’s framework to distinguish four ways help can work.

Emotional support: Empathy, care, and concern. “I can see why you’re disappointed. Want me to stay for a bit?”

Instrumental support: Tangible aid or practical help. A neighbor offers a ride so you can stay for math help.

Informational support: Advice, guidance, or information that helps someone solve a problem. A counselor explains who to ask and when they’re available.

Appraisal support: Feedback or affirmation that helps someone assess themselves or their situation. “Your examples made the presentation easier to follow. Your name being left off doesn’t change what you did.”

These terms name **what the help does**. A caregiver or friend is **who offers it**. A text, call, or conversation in person is **how it reaches you**. More than one kind of help can come from the same person or message.

Offer two choices to start

“Want me to listen first, or help you work out what to do?” As a teen, you can also say, “I’d like you to listen first. I’ll ask if I want advice.”

House’s social support theory (1981), as defined and applied in Jewett (2026), Chapter 2, pp. 91–96, especially Table 1 (p. 96). The examples are fictional.

How relationships provide support: House, Umberson & Landis (1988)

How support can help under stress: Cohen & Wills (1985)

One problem, four ways to help

A teen helped finish a group presentation, but their name is missing from the slides. They're embarrassed and unsure what to do. Here's how different people and channels might help.

PARENT OR CAREGIVER	FRIEND	TEXT, CALL, OR ONLINE
Emotional support · Feel heard		
"I can see why that hurt. Want me to sit with you?"	"That would bother me too. Want to eat lunch together?"	A friend sends a private voice note: "I'm here. Want to talk?"
Instrumental support · Get a hand		
Give them a ride so they can see the teacher before class.	Walk with them to the classroom so they don't go alone.	A classmate shares a copy of the slides they helped make.
Informational support · Find options		
Help them find out when the teacher is available.	Tell them when the teacher is usually free to talk.	Check the class portal for how to ask about group projects.
Appraisal support · See what you did		
"Your slides covered the hardest part. That work mattered."	"Your examples made our argument easier to understand."	A teammate texts: "Your timeline helped me follow the whole thing."

A voice note can show care. Another text can offer feedback. Both arrive on the same phone, but they do different jobs. Start by asking what would help now.

Who can you ask for help?

Teen: Pick something you could use help with this week. In each row, mark who you could ask. Add how you'd reach them, if useful, and write one thing they could do. You can skip a row or keep the page private.

Parent: Let your teen fill in their own page first. If they want to share it, ask what you're already doing that helps. Then see which of the four kinds of support they'd like more of.

Example: For instrumental support, mark "Parent" and write "A ride home after math help." If you'd ask a classmate by text, mark both "Friend" and "Text/online."

KIND OF HELP	WHO / HOW YOU'D ASK	WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY HELP?
Emotional support Who listens and shows they care?	☐ Parent ☐ Friend ☐ Trusted adult ☐ Text/online ☐ Not sure yet	
Instrumental support Who can lend a hand with something specific?	☐ Parent ☐ Friend ☐ Trusted adult ☐ Text/online ☐ Not sure yet	
Informational support Who can help me find out what my options are?	☐ Parent ☐ Friend ☐ Trusted adult ☐ Text/online ☐ Not sure yet	
Appraisal support Who gives feedback that helps me see things more clearly?	☐ Parent ☐ Friend ☐ Trusted adult ☐ Text/online ☐ Not sure yet	

Teen: Which kind of help is hardest to find right now? What would make it easier to ask?

Parent: Pick one specific thing you could offer this week. Ask, "Would this help, or would you like me to do something different?"

Check back in a week: "Did that help the way you wanted it to?"

Make it easier for your teen to come back

Why it matters: After a hard day, it can be a relief to have someone nearby without having to tell the whole story.

What it looks like: Your teen wasn't sure where they'd sit at lunch after a disagreement with friends. When you ask how it went, they say, "Fine," and head to their room. You want to ask whether anyone sat with them. They may have had enough questions for one day.

Words to try: "I remembered you were worried about lunch. You don't have to talk about it. I'll be in the kitchen if you want to hang out."

For parents: Offer something they can say yes to without explaining: a snack, a ride, or a seat next to you while you fold laundry. If they say no, accept it. Later, check in once without asking them to explain why they didn't want to talk earlier. They'll know they can still come find you.

For teens: If you want someone with you but don't want questions yet, you can say, "Can I just sit with you for a bit? I'm not ready to talk about lunch."

OFFER COMPANY WITHOUT ASKING FOR THE WHOLE STORY

Open the door

"I'll be in the kitchen if you want to hang out."

Let them decide

If they say no, give them room.

Check in once later

"Would you like company, or do you still want space?"

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Offer Company Without Pressing

WHEN TO USE IT When your teen gets home after a hard day and keeps their answers short.

WHY IT HELPS They can feel you're there without having to talk before they're ready.

START HERE

Your teen was worried about where to sit at lunch after an argument with friends. Now they say "Fine" and head to their room.

1 Try a different opening

Write the question you want to ask, then replace it with an offer that doesn't require an explanation.

First impulse	Offer instead

2 Three ways to be nearby

Rank three ways to be available, like bringing a snack, walking the dog together, or sitting nearby.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

3 Leave it there

Write one warm thing you can say if they turn down the offer, without slipping in another question.

_____

_____

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Offer company once this week. Let them say no without having to give a reason.

Read the matching concept: p. 48

Ask for Company Without the Questions

WHEN TO USE IT When you want someone nearby but don't feel like talking about what happened.

WHY IT HELPS Naming the kind of company you want makes it easier for the other person to know what would help.

START HERE

Think of a day you didn't want to explain. Imagine what would have felt good then, or use a made-up day.

1 Company or space?

Name one thing you could do together and one way they could give you space if you ask for it.

Company	Space

2 Ask in your own words

Try "Can we sit together? I don't really want to talk yet." Write it the way you'd say it.

3 Give yourself another option

Write what you could do if they're busy or start asking questions you don't want to answer.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Keep these ideas private or try one with someone you trust.

Read the matching concept: p. 48

Notice when an old fear is leading the conversation

Why it matters: A missed text can be upsetting, especially if it brings up a familiar fear. Checking your first guess helps you deal with what actually happened.

What it looks like: You text to ask when your teen will be home. By the time they walk in, you've spent forty minutes worrying, and "You don't care how worried I get" is the first thing you want to say. You know they didn't answer. You don't yet know why.

Words to try: "I got worried when I didn't hear back. What got in the way tonight? I need an update when your ride changes."

For parents: Before you start, separate three things: what happened, what you thought it meant, and what you need next time. They didn't answer; you thought they didn't care; you need a text when the ride changes. If the fear reminds you of your own childhood, notice that privately. Start the conversation with the missed check-in and give them a chance to answer.

For teens: If an adult has guessed wrong about why you didn't reply, say what happened and what you could try next time. "My phone died. If it happens again, I can ask Maya to let me text you from hers."

CHECK THE GUESS BEFORE YOU MAKE THE REQUEST

What happened	What I guessed	What I'll ask
"I didn't get your text."	"I took the silence to mean you didn't care."	"What got in the way? Text me if your ride changes."

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Separate What Happened From What You Guessed

WHEN TO USE IT When a missed text or a late arrival brings up a fear you've felt before.

WHY IT HELPS Checking the facts lets you deal with the missed check-in instead of accusing your teen of not caring.

START HERE

Use an ordinary mix-up, like your teen getting home later than expected without answering your text.

1 Slow it down

Write what happened, what you assumed it meant, and what you can ask to find out more.

What I know	What I guessed	What I'll ask

2 Spot the familiar part

What about this reaction feels familiar? Name one way today's situation might be different.

3 Say what needs to happen next

Write one request your teen can act on, like "Text me if your ride changes."

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

The next time you're unsure, ask the question and give them a chance to answer before making your request.

Read the matching concept: p. 51

Clear Up a Mix-Up

WHEN TO USE IT When someone guesses why you did something and gets it wrong.

WHY IT HELPS You can tell them what happened and say what you could do next time without defending yourself as a person.

START HERE

Pick a mix-up or make one up, like missing a text because your phone died. You don't have to share this page.

1 Guess or fact?

Write what they might have thought and what you know actually happened.

Their guess	What happened

2 One fact and one idea

Try "My phone died. Next time I could text from a friend's phone." Write a version that fits your mix-up.

3 Pick the time

If now isn't a good time, write a line asking to talk later, such as "Could we do this after dinner?"

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Keep your line for yourself, send it, or wait until there's a better time to talk.

Read the matching concept: p. 51

Repair your part without giving up the limit

Why it matters: An apology gives your teen a chance to hear you take their experience seriously. You can still make a plan for getting home safely.

What it looks like: You're arguing about a ride, and you call your teen irresponsible. They walk away. Before asking them to work out the ride, come back to what you said and give them a chance to tell you how it felt.

Words to try: "I called you irresponsible. That was unfair, and I'm sorry. I can see why you left. Next time I'll ask what happened instead of calling you names."

For parents: Wait until you can hear their answer without jumping in to explain yourself. Say what you did, acknowledge how it may have affected them, and name what you'll do differently. If they aren't ready to talk, say when you'll check back and keep your word. Discuss the ride separately. They don't need to accept the apology or offer one of their own before you listen.

For teens: If you still want a say in the ride but don't want to talk while you're upset, ask for time and say what matters. "I can talk after dinner. I want to figure out the ride without being called names."

APOLOGIZE AND KEEP THE SAFETY PLAN

Own your words

"I called you irresponsible. I'm sorry I spoke that way."

Listen to their side

"I want to hear what happened."

Keep the ride plan

"We still need a safe way for you to get home."

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Apologize Without Dropping the Limit

WHEN TO USE IT After you spoke harshly while setting a limit that still matters.

WHY IT HELPS A separate apology makes room for your teen's experience without making safety negotiable.

START HERE

Imagine calling your teen irresponsible in a fight about who would drive them home. Choose that moment or one you wish you'd handled differently.

1 Two things to address

Name the words or tone you regret and the practical issue you still need to resolve.

My part	The safety plan

2 Write the apology

Say what you did, how it may have affected them, and what you'll do differently.

What I did	How it may have felt	Next time

3 Leave them a choice

Write what you'll say if they aren't ready to talk, without asking them to forgive you first.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Offer the apology without asking for one back. Agree on a time to return to the practical plan if needed.

Read the matching concept: p. 54

Have a Say Even If You Need a Pause

WHEN TO USE IT After a fight when there's still a ride or another plan to work out.

WHY IT HELPS Asking for time lets you say what you need without having to finish a hard conversation on the spot.

START HERE

Use a real or made-up argument, such as disagreeing about how you'll get home. This page can stay private.

1 Name the two problems

Write what you'd like to change about how the conversation went and what still needs to be decided.

How we talk	What's still open

2 Ask for a restart

Write a line like "I'll talk after dinner. Please don't call me names when we do."

3 Choose someone to check with

If it would help to think this through first, name one trusted person and a question you could ask.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Use one line when you're ready. You don't owe an apology for someone else's words.

Read the matching concept: p. 54

Let them know they can come back later

In the research I reviewed, teens who felt close to caregivers or could count on help at home often reported fewer depressive symptoms. That doesn't mean a parent can fix depression by saying the right thing.

Your teen comes home, drops their bag, and goes straight to their room. You can show you're glad they're home without asking them to tell you what happened right away.

For parents: Make one offer you can keep: "I'll be in the kitchen for a while. Want some food or company?" If they say no, let them know the offer still stands later.

For teens: You don't need to tell the whole story to ask for company. "Can I sit with you? I'm not ready to talk." If home doesn't feel safe, you can ask another trusted adult.

Make the offer more than once

Offer again another day, without making them explain why they said no last time.

Jewett (2026), Chapter 4, pp. 135–153; Appendices E and H. Examples: Tardif-Grenier et al. (2021); Shoshani & Kor (2022); Y. Li et al. (2024).

Staying Present Through Changes and Challenges

Section summary: Going out with friends, asking about a relationship, and calling for a ride all ask something different of a teen. Siegel’s starting point is useful in each case: find out what matters to them before you decide what to do. If neither of you can listen yet, name a time to come back to the conversation. If someone needs help getting safe, help them first.



HOW TO PAUSE AND RESTART A HARD TALK

Notice the cue

If you’re getting louder, stop before making another point.

Set a return time

“I need ten minutes. I’ll come find you at seven.”

Restart with care

Own your tone if needed. Ask what they want you to hear.

Go to Science in Plain English · 59

What changes when you can name the feeling



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

The amygdala is part of a network that helps the brain notice and respond to what feels emotionally important. In a brain-imaging study, adults who put a word to the feeling shown in a photo showed lower amygdala activity than in a comparison task. An area involved in choosing how to respond was more active. The study was done with adults in a lab. It offers a reason to try naming a feeling, rather than a prediction of how someone will respond in an argument.

Say you snapped when someone corrected you in front of friends. If you can recognize, “I’m embarrassed,” you may have a better idea of what you need. You might ask to talk privately. You can name the feeling to yourself first. You don’t have to share it. Study on putting feelings into words

How to use this. If you’re about to snap, try naming what you feel first. A parent might notice, “I’m worried about the ride home,” and say what they need instead of criticizing.

TRY A FEELING WORD BEFORE YOU ANSWER

Notice the moment

You snapped after someone corrected you. Pause.

Try one word

“Am I embarrassed, not just angry?” You can think it.

Choose what to do

If the word fits, it may help you choose what to say next.

Read the first topic · 60 Find the source and study notes

Understand what matters before deciding what's allowed

Why it matters: If you know why a plan matters to your teen, you can look for options they'd actually want without agreeing to a plan you don't think is safe.

What it looks like: Your sixteen-year-old wants to go to a late concert two towns away. You're trying to figure out who can drive them home. They're thinking about their friend who moves next week and how much they want this last night together.

Words to try: "It sounds like this is mostly about having one more night with her before she moves. Is that right? I need to know how you're getting home before I can say yes. Who could we ask?"

For parents: Check that you understand why they want to go. Then say what's open for discussion, such as which adult can drive, and what has to be in place, such as a confirmed ride home. If you can't make it work, tell them what fell through. You can understand why they're disappointed without changing your answer.

For teens: Say what matters and bring one option you've checked. "I want to go because it's the last concert before she moves. Her dad said he can bring me home. Can we see if that would work?"

BEFORE YOU ANSWER A REQUEST

Check what matters

"It's your last night out with her. Did I get that?"

Name what you need

"I can't say yes without a confirmed ride home."

Find an option

"Which trusted adult could we ask to drive?"

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Hear the Reason Before You Answer

WHEN TO USE IT Before answering a request when your teen cares about it and you have a safety concern.

WHY IT HELPS Knowing what matters to them can help you see a safer option that still matters to them.

START HERE

Your teen wants to go to a late concert with a friend who is moving away. The ride home isn't confirmed. Try this request or a similar one.

1 Write both concerns

Name what your teen says matters to them and the concrete safety issue you need to check.

What matters to them	What I need to check

2 Check your understanding

Try "It sounds like you want one last night out with your friend. Did I get that right?" Write it in your own words.

3 Name what's open

Write what they can help decide and what must be in place before you can say yes.

Open to ideas	Safety requirement

4 If it's a no

Write the reason and one other option you'd honestly consider.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Say what you heard before you give your answer. Give them a chance to correct you.

Read the matching concept: p. 60

Explain Why It Matters to You

WHEN TO USE IT Before asking permission for a plan an adult might say no to.

WHY IT HELPS A real reason and a checked backup give you both something specific to talk through.

START HERE

Imagine asking to go to a late concert before your friend moves away. Use your own plan if you want.

1 The reason they might miss

Finish "This matters to me because ___." Be specific about what you'd be missing.

2 Take their worry seriously

Write one thing they might worry about and one backup you can check yourself.

Possible concern	Backup I can check

3 If the first plan doesn't work

Write one question you can ask about what could change, like "Would it work if we had a confirmed ride?"

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Choose one sentence to start with. You don't have to show this page.

Read the matching concept: p. 60

Be someone they can talk to about the awkward things

Why it matters: When a teen tries out an uncomfortable question, hearing it taken seriously can make it easier to come back for more help.

What it looks like: Your teen says a friend is dating someone who wants to read all their messages. You wonder if they're asking for themselves. You can talk about privacy and pressure without asking them to say whose relationship it is.

Words to try: "You don't have to tell me who it's about. They can say no to sharing messages. Want to talk about what they could say if the person keeps asking?"

For parents: Answer what they asked. Tell them a boundary applies to their phone as much as it does in person, and they can ask for help even if they said yes before. If they bring up attraction or identity, listen without asking them to pick a label or explain more than they want to. If someone is in danger, focus first on getting them somewhere safe.

For teens: Pick someone you trust and ask the part you want help with. "Someone wants my password. Can you help me figure out what to say if they won't drop it?" You can start there and decide later what else to share.

WHEN YOUR TEEN ASKS ABOUT A PRIVATE BOUNDARY

Give them room

"You don't have to tell me who it's about."

Answer the question

"They can say no to sharing their messages."

Offer help

"Want to talk through what they could say if it keeps happening?"

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Make It Easier to Ask an Awkward Question

WHEN TO USE IT When your teen asks about a sensitive situation but doesn't tell you whose it is.

WHY IT HELPS They can get help without having to share details they're not ready to share.

START HERE

Your teen asks what someone should do if the person they're dating wants their phone password. Practice answering without asking who it's about.

1 Trade your first response

Write your first impulse, then an opener that doesn't ask who it happened to.

My first impulse	What I'll say instead

2 Find out what they want

Write a line that lets them choose: do they want you to listen, help find words, or help them get support?

3 Say what privacy means

Write what can stay private and how you'll explain getting help if someone may be in danger.

What stays private	When I'll get help

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Start with the question they actually asked. If someone is in immediate danger, help them get safe first.

Read the matching concept: p. 63

Ask a Private Question Your Way

WHEN TO USE IT When you want advice about something personal but don’t want to tell the whole story.

WHY IT HELPS Practicing one question puts you in charge of how you start and what details you share.

START HERE

Pick a real or made-up topic, like being pressured to share a password. You don’t have to show this page to anyone.

1 Choose a way to start

Rank three ways to ask: by text, side by side on a walk, or in a private conversation.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

2 Make it one question

Write one question that asks for the help you want, like “What could I say if someone asks for my password?”

_____

_____

3 Decide what to share

Write one detail you’re okay sharing and one line to use if you’re asked to tell more.

Okay to share	My privacy line
_____	_____
_____	_____

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Choose a trusted adult you could ask. If you’re in immediate danger, get help now instead of waiting for the right words.

Read the matching concept: p. 63

Keep the messages that help

What happens online can matter more than how much time someone spends there. A private message can help a teen feel less alone. A group chat can also leave them feeling excluded.

One evening, a friend’s voice note makes your teen laugh. A few minutes later, a group chat turns into jokes at their expense. Both happened on the same phone, but they had different effects.

For parents: Ask what they want to keep and what they want help changing. Offer to help mute or report a thread without reading every message. If there are threats or harassment, help them get support.

For teens: If the group feels hurtful, try texting a friend separately: “Can we talk one-on-one? I’m done with the group tonight.”

Change one thing and see how it feels

Keep talking to the friend you trust. Try muting the group and notice whether you feel better afterward.

Jewett (2026), Chapter 4, pp. 168–183; Appendices G and J. Examples: James et al. (2023); Tao & Fisher (2022); Ellis et al. (2020).

Practice the call you want them to make

Why it matters: Before an outing, agree on what your teen can send and who can help. They'll have less to figure out if the ride falls through.

What it looks like: Your teen goes to a party. The friend who was supposed to drive home has been drinking, and others are already heading toward the car. Your teen needs a way to leave without having to explain the whole night before anyone comes.

Words to try: "If your ride isn't safe or you want to leave, call or text. I'll help get you home. We can talk about what happened later."

For parents: Agree on a short message that means "I need a ride now." Confirm that one other trusted adult can answer if you can't. When the message comes, confirm the pickup spot and get your teen home first. Keep your rules clear, but don't make the ride depend on whether they followed them. If concerns about substance use keep coming up, talk about getting more support when everyone is safe.

For teens: Before you go, save both numbers and make sure you know where you could safely wait. A text can be as simple as, "I need a ride. I'm at the front entrance." You can leave before your friends do.

WHEN A RIDE FROM A PARTY STOPS FEELING SAFE

Send a plain text

"I need a ride. I'm by the front entrance."

Have a second person

Agree ahead of time on another adult who can pick them up.

Help first

Get them home. Talk about the night when you're both settled.

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Practice the Pickup Before It’s Needed

WHEN TO USE IT Before an outing where your teen may need to leave, especially if someone else is driving.

WHY IT HELPS A plan you’ve already tried is easier to follow when your teen feels rushed or uncomfortable.

START HERE

Imagine your teen is at a party and no longer trusts their ride. Plan with them while things are calm, and check that the backup adult agrees.

1 Choose their shortest signal

Agree on a text or phrase that means “I need help leaving.” They don’t have to explain to get a safe ride.

2 Run the three steps

Write your first reply, where to meet or how to find them, and who can help if you can’t pick up.

Reply first	Safe pickup	Backup adult

3 Practice what you’ll say

Write your first line at pickup, like “I’m glad you called. Let’s get home.” No lecture before or during the ride.

4 When not to wait

Name a situation that needs emergency services now, such as someone who won’t wake up.

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Test the signal once and save the backup number. Get them safe first; talk about what happened later.

Read the matching concept: p. 67

Have a Way to Leave

WHEN TO USE IT Before going out, in case your ride falls through or doesn't feel safe.

WHY IT HELPS A short text and a backup give you a way out even if your friends aren't ready to go.

START HERE

Imagine a party where the person driving has been drinking. Plan what you could do next. You don't have to describe a real night out.

1 A text you'll send

Write a short message asking for help leaving and decide how you'll tell them where to pick you up.

2 Plan two contacts

Name the first person you'll try, a backup, and a safe place to wait rather than getting in the car.

First contact	Backup	Safe place

3 Try the line out loud

Write a line to use if someone presses you to stay, like "My ride is coming. I'm heading outside."

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Test your message when things are calm. If someone is in immediate danger, call emergency services instead of waiting for a ride.

Read the matching concept: p. 67

Ask different people for different help

Use this when one person can’t give you all the help you need. Start by naming what would make tomorrow easier.

A teen who changed schools eats lunch in the stairwell. An old friend texts at lunch, and that helps. But they still need a place to eat where they can feel comfortable.

A classmate could walk in with them. A school counselor could help find a quieter place. A caregiver could help make the first contact. If the distress keeps getting in the way, a clinician can help assess what’s happening. The old friend can keep texting without having to solve the problem.

Pick one person to ask first

“Would you rather ask the counselor with me there, or have me ask if there’s a quieter place to eat?” Agree on who will ask and when.

WHO COULD HELP WITH THIS?

Ask at home
Ask for a ride, a check-in, or help making the first call.

Ask a friend
Ask a friend to text at lunch or walk in with you.

Ask at school
Ask a counselor to help you find a quieter place to eat.

Ask a clinician
If distress keeps getting in the way, ask for an evaluation.

Jewett (2026), Chapter 5, pp. 185–186, 196–202, 206, 209–210. The support circle is an original workbook application, not a tested intervention.

Make time for something you miss

Why it matters: When most of your conversations are reminders, even ten minutes spent enjoying something together can be a welcome change.

Siegel lists different kinds of time in his later Mindsight section: time to reflect, sleep, focus, unwind, play, move, and connect. Look at a typical week and notice what you miss. Pick one thing you'd like a little more of.

What it looks like: You realize the last three times you talked in the car were about missing assignments. On the way home, you could stop together for a snack and let school wait. Or play a quick game when you get home and forget the score.

Words to try: "What's one thing we used to do for fun that you'd like to do again?"

For parents: Ask your teen to pick one small thing and a time you can both make. If they choose a quiet drive or walking the dog without talking much, let the time be what they asked for. Afterward, see whether you'd both like to do it again.

For teens: Ask for a small pocket of time without the topic you're tired of hearing about. "Want to walk the dog with me for ten minutes? Can we leave school out of it this time?"

TRY ONE TEN-MINUTE CHANGE

Pick what you miss
Would quiet, movement, play, or company feel good?

Choose a time
Try ten minutes after dinner or another time that fits.

Decide afterward
Would you keep it, move it, or try something else?

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

Put One Enjoyable Thing Back in the Week

WHEN TO USE IT When most conversations are about rides, chores, or reminders.

WHY IT HELPS A few minutes together with no lesson attached gives you another way to connect.

START HERE

Think of an ordinary weekday. Pick something you miss doing together, like a snack run, playing music, or walking quietly.

1 **Circle a real opening**

Draw a simple timeline and mark a ten-minute window that won't come out of anyone's sleep.

2 **Trade, don't add**

Name one thing that can wait and what you'd enjoy doing with that time instead.

Set aside	Make room for

3 **Offer it without a lesson**

Write an invitation with a way to decline, like "Want to come get a snack, or would you rather stay in?"

4 **Check after trying it**

Write one simple question to ask next week, like "Want to do that again or try something different?"

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Make the invitation once. Let your teen choose whether to join or suggest something else.

Read the matching concept: p. 71

Take Ten Minutes for Something You Miss

WHEN TO USE IT When the week fills up and you haven’t had quiet, fun, or time with someone you like.

WHY IT HELPS A small window is easier to fit in than a whole afternoon, and you can find out if it helps.

START HERE

Pick something you wish you’d had more time for this week. Daydreaming, rest, or hanging out all count.

1 What’s been missing?

Rank three things you’d like more of, such as time with a friend, movement, or quiet.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

2 Give it a place

Draw one slice of your day and mark ten minutes you could use without giving up sleep.

3 Ask for what you want

Write one request, like “Can we walk the dog together and not talk about school?”

_____

_____

ONE SMALL NEXT STEP

Try it once, then keep it, move it, or swap it. You don’t have to show this page.

Read the matching concept: p. 71

Try one conversation differently this week

Choose something small that keeps coming up, like getting home from a game or putting the phone away at night. Start with one conversation while neither of you is already upset.

Before you talk. What actually happened last time? What did you make it mean? A parent might think, “They ignored my text.” A teen might think, “They assume I did something wrong.” It helps to notice what you’re guessing before you start talking.

If you’re the parent. Try, “I didn’t hear from you when the ride changed. What happened from your side?” Give them time to answer. Then name what you need for next time, such as a text before they get into a different car.

If you’re the teen. Try, “I can talk about it. Can I have ten minutes first? I’ll come find you.” When you come back, tell them what you’d like them to understand and what you can agree to do next time.

Afterward. Notice what helped you keep talking. If you said something that hurt, go back and own it. You can apologize for how you spoke and still come back to the safety plan.

When you need more help. If a change in mood, sleep, behavior, or relationships lasts or starts getting in the way of everyday life, you can ask a pediatrician or mental health professional for help figuring out what’s going on. NIMH: Children and mental health.

TRY ONE CONVERSATION DIFFERENTLY

Before	During	After
Separate what happened from what you guessed it meant.	Ask for their side. If you pause, say when you’ll come back.	Notice what helped. If you hurt them, go back and own it.

ONE THING I MIGHT TRY

When it’s time to ask for more help

Reach out if changes in mood or behavior last for weeks, cause distress, or get in the way of daily life. You don’t have to wait until all three are true. If you’re the teen noticing the change, tell an adult you trust.

Your teen has stopped going to soccer and often sleeps through the alarm. You might say, “You’ve missed practice and mornings seem harder. How have things felt lately?” Give them a moment. If they’d rather talk with someone else, help them find that person.

Ask a pediatrician, primary care clinician, or mental health professional about an evaluation. Bring a short note about what changed, when it started, and what’s harder now. You don’t need to know the cause before asking for help.

Act right away on safety concerns

If a teen talks about hurting themselves or someone else, or you’re worried they’re unsafe, seek help right away. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support. For immediate, life-threatening danger, call 911.

Jewett (2026), Chapter 5, pp. 196–202, 209–210, informs the support context. Guidance on when to seek help: National Institute of Mental Health, nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/children-and-mental-health.

National Institute of Mental Health: Children and Mental Health

U.S. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

One last thought

When your teen tells you about a new friend, interest, or plan, ask one question before sharing your opinion. “What do you like about it?” is a good place to start. Then give them time to answer. If you need to set a limit, explain why after you’ve heard them. They may still disagree, but they’ll have had a chance to tell you what you might have missed.

LISTEN WHEN YOU DISAGREE

Ask first

What matters to you about this?

Check what you heard

Did I get that right? Give them time to answer.

Say what stays firm

I hear why you want to go. I still need a safe ride plan.

Book credit

THE SOURCE BOOK

Daniel J. Siegel, MD

Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain.

Tarcher/Penguin, 2014. Paperback edition, 2015. Publisher’s book page · Published contents

What this guide draws from

I’ve organized this guide around all four parts of the audiobook narrated by Siegel. It follows his ideas about how teens grow, how their brains develop, how relationships support independence, and how parents and teens can stay in conversation.

What was created for this guide and workbook

The examples, suggested words, exercises, and drawings were created for this guide. The people in the examples are fictional. Use the diagrams to find a step you can try, then adapt it to fit your family.

The companion is separate from Siegel’s book; copyright in the book remains with its rights holder.

Research and further reading

If you'd like to learn more, start with the source that goes with the science page you're reading. These sources explain the research behind the ideas. The activities are my examples of how you might put those ideas to use.

PART 01 / Peer context and reward

Chein, J., Albert, D., O'Brien, L., Uckert, K., & Steinberg, L. (2011). Peers increase adolescent risk taking by enhancing activity in the brain's reward circuitry. *Developmental Science, 14*(2), F1–F10. Study.

The driving simulation shows one way friends' presence can affect choices. For the book's four themes, see Siegel's essay on ESSENCE.

PART 02 / Development, judgment, and sleep

National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). *The Teen Brain: 7 Things to Know*. NIMH overview.

Background on ongoing development, social learning, sleep, and resilience.

PART 03 / Parental warmth and daily stress

Lippold, M. A., Davis, K. D., McHale, S. M., Buxton, O. M., & Almeida, D. M. (2016). Daily stressor reactivity during adolescence: The buffering role of parental warmth. *Health Psychology, 35*(9), 1027–1035. Study.

An observational daily-life study; association is not proof that warmth caused recovery.

PART 04 / Putting feelings into words

Lieberman, M. D., et al. (2007). Putting feelings into words: Affect labeling disrupts amygdala activity in response to affective stimuli. *Psychological Science, 18*(5), 421–428. Study.

An adult laboratory study; it does not establish how a particular teen will respond during conflict.

When more support may help. NIMH: Children and Mental Health.

Where these ideas and findings come from

My doctoral project. Katherine Holt Jewett (2026). *Social Support Systems and Adolescent Depression in the Post-COVID-19 Era*. Doctoral project, California Southern University. Chapter 2 covers development and social support (pp. 28–113). Chapter 3 explains the review methods (pp. 114–131). Chapters 4 and 5 describe the findings, limits, and applications (pp. 132–210). All citations refer to the project's printed pages.

The book and the review answer different questions. Daniel J. Siegel's *Brainstorm* gives this guide its four-part structure. My review examines how support from family and peers, and support delivered through digital communication, relate to adolescent depressive symptoms. The stories, scripts, and activities are original examples. The review didn't test whether using them improves symptoms.

What the review can tell us. It included 81 distinct studies. Some followed people over time; others took a snapshot of their experiences or tested a specific program. An association does not establish cause. A trial of one program doesn't tell us whether every similar activity works. I did not pool results into one estimate or formally rate each study's risk of bias.

Adolescence and social context: Sawyer and colleagues (2018)

Parent relationships over time: Afriat and colleagues (2023)

Peer connection and social technology: James and colleagues (2023)

Pandemic stress, family conflict, and connection: Magson and colleagues (2021)

Access and trust: Banks (2022)

Early-adolescent caregiver program: Mauricio and colleagues (2026)

U.S. National Institute of Mental Health: Teen Depression

U.S. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Reward responses at different ages: Galván and colleagues (2006)

Emotional reactions and developing brain connections: Hare and colleagues (2008)

Sensitivity to being watched by a peer: Somerville and colleagues (2013)