

What, When, Why, and How Messages

It can be difficult to accurately express the emotional impact of another person's behavior and to communicate what new behavior would be more respectful. Using What, When, Why, and How messages help adolescents develop both relationship and social awareness skills by helping them communicate both positive and strong emotions, develop the ability to ask for what they need, and develop the ability to hear and respond appropriately to the needs of others.

Here are some ways to use What, When, Why, and How Messages:

1. **WHAT** Name the feeling. *I feel _____.*
2. **WHEN** Explain what behavior is bothering you or what you appreciate. *When you _____.*
3. **WHY** Describe why you are feeling this way. *Because I _____.*
4. **HOW** (Use as an option for a bothering behavior.) State how you would like the other person to behave in order to better meet your needs. *I wish/I want/It would help if _____.*

We need What, When, Why, and How Messages to express our emotions and communicate our needs in order to be heard and understood.

Building Your Adolescent's Social and Emotional Competence

Relationship skills and social awareness are social and emotional competencies that help adolescents establish and maintain healthy, rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. These activities help adolescents build communication, seeking help, and empathy skills.

Act It Out!

Partner with your adolescent to act out how to use What, When, Why, and How Messages to address emotional situations with others who care about them but may have inadvertently hurt their feelings or not met an important need.

Respond to It!

Invite your adolescent to apply What, When, Why, and How Messages to a real-life situation, such as a disagreement with a sibling or friend. Have them create What, When, Why, and How Messages from the perspective of the other person.

Many adolescents are experiencing feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear due to the onset of COVID-19. They need a chance to share their thoughts and feelings and ask questions. Make sure you are accurately informed and ready to educate your adolescent knowing the information is evolving all the time. Get information from: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

