



Cheat Sheet

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUTH

Instead of saying...	Try saying...
When I was your age, I had it worse. Comparing struggles can make youth feel judged instead of supported.	Can you tell me more about that? Open-ended questions encourage conversation and show genuine interest.
You're overreacting. This dismisses emotions and may cause youth to stop sharing their feelings.	How can I support you right now? This gives youth a sense of choice and reminds them they are not alone.
It's not a big deal. Even if a problem seems small to an adult, it may feel huge to a youth. This can make them feel ignored or misunderstood.	Would you like advice, or do you just want me to listen? This helps avoid unwanted advice and teaches respectful communication.
You just need to toughen up. This can teach youth to hide emotions instead of asking for help.	That sounds really hard. Validating feelings helps youth feel understood instead of dismissed.
Why would you do something so stupid? Shame-based language damages trust and can make youth afraid to be honest.	Everyone makes mistakes. We can work through this. This reduces shame and helps youth focus on problem-solving.
Because I said so. While boundaries are important, shutting down conversation can prevent understanding and connection.	This is what I need, here's why it matters, and I'm happy to talk about it with you. This helps youth feel respected while still making it clear that the adult is responsible for setting rules and boundaries.
You are not making any sense. This communicates dismissal, frustration or judgement, rather than curiosity.	I'm having trouble understanding what you mean –or– I may not fully understand, but I want to learn. Being open-minded builds trust and shows respect for their experience.
You should already know better. Youth are still learning and growing. Statements like this can increase embarrassment and self-doubt.	I'm glad you told me –or– Thank you for being honest with me. Positive responses make youth more likely to communicate in the future.