

The Five Core Needs of Children and Adolescents

Excerpted from: *Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent's Guide to Talking Sense About Sex* by Debbie Roffman.

1. Affirmation

Children and adolescents need adults to recognize and validate them and their particular stage of growth and development.

Skills:

- Educate yourself about the typical characteristics of children at different ages and stages.
- Continually hone your understanding of your child, individually and developmentally.
- Learn the technique of “active listening.”
- Accept and validate your child’s feelings, as distinguished from his or her behavior.
- Learn your biases and “hot buttons” to stay calm and separate, and to maintain a child-centered focus.
- Validate your child’s efforts and progress; criticize the behavior not the child.
- Bring up sensitive subjects and encourage your child to do the same.
- Remember continually to look at the world through the eyes of your child, taking into account the developmental, social, and cultural context.

2. Information Giving

Children and adolescents need factual knowledge and concepts provided in ongoing, age appropriate way.

Skills:

- Educate yourself about the kinds of risks your child may face,
- Actively teach children and adolescents about behaviors that are healthy and unhealthy, and why.
- Provide scary information in an honest and balanced way.
- As children mature, teach them how to gather and process health information on their own.

3. Values Clarification

Children and adolescents need adults to clearly articulate their parental values and to clarify and interpret values and values systems in the surrounding culture.

Skills:

- Articulate your values clearly and openly, without moralizing, and make sure your child understands what you are trying to communicate.
- Dialogue with your partner (and other caretakers) so that to the extent possible consistent values can be conveyed.
- Model ethical behavior; recognize how your actions affect the development of your child’s values.
- Look for and acknowledge conflicts between your words and your actions.
- Learn how to interpret unspoken media messages and teach your child to do the same,

- Point out the connections between your child’s behaviors and the specific values they reflect.

4. Limit Setting

Children and adolescents need adults to create a healthy and safe environment by stating and reinforcing age appropriate rules and limits.

Skills~

- Understand that limits are not optional, but “oxygen” for children *and* adolescents.
- Encourage your child to respect the importance of personal limits and boundaries.
- Gain a realistic understanding of what children are capable and not capable of handling at different stages of development.
- Explain and discuss rules and expectations in advance; set limits based on your understanding of development and the unique characteristics of the individual child,
- Follow through with logical consequences that relate to specific behaviors.
- Monitor your child’s behavior; make sure there is a clear adult “presence” whenever children and adolescents congregate.
- Let children know at an early age that they are not “free agents,” and that you will be a limit setter in their life indefinitely, but that limits and boundaries will be negotiated as they earn your confidence in their abilities.

5. Anticipatory Guidance

Children and adolescents need adults to help them learn how to avoid or handle potentially harmful situations, and to prepare them for times when they will need to rely on themselves to make responsible and healthy choices.

Skills:

- Support independence by teaching your child/adolescent to utilize effective decision-making and problem-solving skills.
- Prepare yourself and your child for what comes next; e.g., what you and they can expect in middle school or high school.
- Help your child think through potentially uncomfortable or dangerous social situations in advance; “walk them through” helpful things to say and do.
- Develop a “no questions asked until tomorrow” escape plan with your child for helping her or him exit dangerous or uncomfortable situations.
- As children mature, and you lose more direct control, learn to become your child’s “consultant” to maintain influence.

Reference: *Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent’s Guide to Talking Sense About Sex* by Debbie Roffman.