

# Families for SAFE Dates

*A Program for Parents and Other Caregivers  
to Help Teens Date Safely*

## BOOKLET 2

### Skills for Handling Conflict





## Skills for Handling Conflict

Dating is mostly fun and exciting. But arguments, disagreements, and conflict do happen between teens who date. This booklet helps caregivers teach their teens practical skills for handling conflict. Teens will learn (1) techniques for managing their own anger and (2) skills for settling disagreements. Using these skills can keep conflicts from turning into bad dating situations. Caregivers and teens can also use these skills in other kinds of relationships, including their relationship with each other.

### Instructions

1. Do activity 1, How You Feel and How You Deal.
2. Do activity 2, Skills for Settling Disagreements.
3. Do activity 3, Practicing SAFE Skills.
4. Read the Recap of booklet 2.
5. Do the Next Steps listed at the end of the booklet.

Before you start each activity with your teen, read the introduction and instructions aloud, taking turns reading if you prefer.



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You'll need a total of about 50 minutes to do these activities, in one or more sittings.  
They should be done in the order they appear.

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## ACTIVITY 1

### How You Feel and How You Deal

**Purpose:** To help teens deal with anger toward dating partners.

**Time needed:** 20 minutes

**Introduction:** It's natural to feel angry sometimes. But how do we deal with being angry? That can make the difference between a good and a bad dating relationship. To better handle anger, people need to (a) understand their hot buttons, or things that make them angry; (b) identify their signs of anger; and (c) have some calming strategies they can use when they are angry. This activity includes three parts (A, B, and C) that help you with each of these. Caregivers will be doing the activities along with their teens, so both can learn some anger management skills.

## Part A: Identifying Hot Buttons

**Instructions:** When do you get really mad? What situations trigger those feelings? These are your hot buttons. Teens and caregivers, finish the sentences below to identify your hot buttons.

### TEEN: MY HOT BUTTONS

I get really mad when one of my friends \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when my teacher \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when a brother or sister (if you have one) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when a stranger \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when a teen I don't know well \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when someone I am dating (if you are dating) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### CAREGIVER: MY HOT BUTTONS

I get really mad when one of my friends \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when my child's teacher \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when a brother or sister (if you have one) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when a stranger \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when another parent \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I get really mad when my partner (if you have one) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Part B: Identifying Signs of Anger

**Introduction:** Sometimes we don't realize how angry we are until we're about to explode. But when we're angry, our bodies give us signs—some physical and some psychological. In this exercise, you'll learn to recognize and understand your signs of anger.

**Instructions:** Teens and caregivers, answer each question below about signs of anger for yourself and each other. Some examples might be clenching your fists or grinding your teeth. Other examples are at the bottom of this page.

### FOR TEENS

When my caregiver gets angry, he or she \_\_\_\_\_

When I get angry, I \_\_\_\_\_

### FOR CAREGIVERS

When my teen gets angry, he or she \_\_\_\_\_

When I get angry, I \_\_\_\_\_

#### EXAMPLES OF SIGNS OF ANGER

- trembling
- clenching fists
- grinding teeth
- tensing muscles
- glaring
- scowling
- face gets red
- palms get sweaty
- eyes water
- head aches
- heart rate speeds up
- feeling chills or goose bumps; shivering
- butterflies in the stomach
- trouble swallowing
- changes in breathing: shallow breaths (hyperventilating) or deep ones
- going silent; not responding
- cursing
- slamming doors; throwing things

## Part C: Calming Strategies

**Introduction:** Right after you realize a hot button has been pushed, your thinking is clear and you can choose how to respond to the anger. But you may only have a few seconds! Once you get really angry, it's harder to think clearly. So, think of and plan some immediate calming strategies to use at that moment. One example is taking one or a few deep breaths before responding to the situation.

If you're still angry later, you can use longer-term calming strategies: for example, take a walk outside.

**Instructions:** Write down some immediate calming strategies and later calming strategies that would work for you. Examples are on the next page.

### TEEN

When a hot button has been pushed and I'm feeling my personal anger signs,  
I can calm down by:

**IMMEDIATE CALMING STRATEGIES:**

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**LATER CALMING STRATEGIES:**

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### CAREGIVER

When a hot button has been pushed and I'm feeling my personal anger signs,  
I can calm down by:

**IMMEDIATE CALMING STRATEGIES:**

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**LATER CALMING STRATEGIES:**

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### EXAMPLES OF IMMEDIATE CALMING STRATEGIES

- Take a deep breath
- Cry
- Say, "I'll be right back," then go into another room for a minute. Breathe deeply, scream, hit a pillow—do what you need to do—then return to the conversation.
- Think of something that makes you happy
- Tell the person why you're angry
- Talk to yourself ("stay cool," "relax," "take it easy")
- Use humor (tell a joke or offer a funny insight if you have one)
- Count forward or backward

### EXAMPLES OF LATER CALMING STRATEGIES

- Go for a walk, run, or workout
- Play a sport
- Play with a pet
- Meditate
- Go dancing
- Ask someone for advice
- Play solitaire or another calming game
- Listen to music
- Watch a movie
- Read a book
- Call a friend
- Take a nap
- Clean your room
- Wash the car
- Mow the lawn



## ACTIVITY 2

### Skills for Settling Disagreements

**Purpose:** To teach teens skills for settling disagreements.

**Time needed:** 15 minutes

**Introduction:** Disagreements sometimes happen between dating teens. This two-part activity offers some useful techniques for settling them.



# Part A: Skills for Settling Disagreements

**Instructions:** Four skills for settling disagreements are described on this page. Each skill is represented by one letter in the word “SAFE” to make it easy to remember. Read and think about these four skills.

## **S**tay calm

- Use your calming strategies to stay cool and collected.

## **A**sk questions

- Ask honest and open questions to better understand the situation.
- Don’t jump to conclusions.

## **F**ind out feelings

- Find out how the other person feels about the situation that is causing the disagreement.
- Express your own feelings: be honest and specific about why the situation upsets you.
- Use “I statements” when expressing your feelings. Say “I feel (*state your feeling*) when you (*state the behavior you don’t like*) because (*state your reason for feeling that way*).” For example: “I feel *mad* when you *ignore me* because *I’m afraid you don’t care*.”

## **E**xchange ideas for a possible solution

- Considering all of this information, suggest possible solutions or compromises.
- Talk about which ones work best for the two of you.

## Part B: Michelle and Kevin

**Instructions:** Decide which person will read which role, and read the dialogue out loud. While you're reading, notice where the word SAFE appears: in those spots, Michelle or Kevin is using a skill for settling a disagreement. Look at the skills on the previous page, decide which skill (or skills) is being used in the dialogue, and circle the appropriate letter on the script. When you've finished reading, discuss why you circled certain skills. The answers can be found on page 14 at the back of this booklet.

### Background

Michelle and Kevin have been dating for six months. They met just before finishing eighth grade and spent a wonderful summer together. Now they're beginning high school. Michelle is on the school swim team. She has had long practices after school every day, but today the coach let the team go early. Michelle ran home and called Kevin to ask him to come over. Kevin said he'd be right over, but he sounded a little upset over the phone.

### Script

**Kevin** knocks on the door.

**Michelle:** (*answers the door and sees Kevin*) I'm so glad to see you. I have so much to tell you.

**K:** Yeah, I bet you do.

**M:** What do you mean, "I bet you do"? Kevin, are you angry?

1. **S A F E**

**K:** Yeah, I'm angry (*raises his voice*). I never see you any more. You say it's because of swim practice, but I think it's because you'd rather spend time with that guy on your team. I see you talking to him all the time at school. What's that all about?

2. **S A F E**

**M:** *(wants to raise her voice back at him, but instead takes a deep breath and pauses a minute)* I think you're talking about Greg. The coach has Greg helping me with my backstroke. He made the national team last year in backstroke.

3. **S A F E**

**K:** Oh, great. I bet while he's coaching you, he has his hands all over you.

**M:** Kevin, I feel mad when you say that because it sounds like you don't trust me. When Greg and I are talking at school, it's about what I should be working on in my next swim practice.

4. **S A F E**

**K:** I'm sorry. I do trust you. But I don't like it that I hardly ever see you anymore, and I'm worried that you'd rather be with him than me. Is that true?

5. **S A F E**

**M:** No, that's not true. I love you. I don't want to be with Greg or anyone else but you. Swimming is important to me. I don't want to give that up, and Greg's giving me some good ideas on how to improve my backstroke. But I don't like not seeing you either. What can we do?

6. **S A F E**

**K:** Are you always going to get out early on Fridays?

7. **S A F E**

**M:** No, but I can see you later on Fridays and over the weekend.

8. **S A F E**

**K:** Yeah, maybe during the week we could talk on the phone more.

9. **S A F E**

**M:** Definitely. You know I have to have dinner with my family, but maybe you could come over after dinner sometimes—or even have dinner with us.

10. **S A F E**

**K:** Look, Michelle, I'm sorry I got so upset. I didn't mean to insult you. I trust you, and I know we can make enough time to see each other. I'm glad to know that you'd rather be with me than Greg.

11. **S A F E**



## ACTIVITY 3

### Practicing SAFE Skills

**Purpose:** To give teens and caregivers practice in using the four SAFE skills.

**Time needed:** 15 minutes

**Introduction:** In this activity, caregivers and teens practice using the four SAFE skills for settling disagreements. You'll be working toward solving a disagreement between Jamal and Lauren. Read the background information below and the script on the following pages, and then answer the questions at the end to practice settling a disagreement. Answers can be found on page 14 at the back of this booklet.

### Background Information

#### **Jamal**

Jamal has been dating Lauren for three months, and they've been spending *all* their free time together. He hasn't hung out or played basketball with his friends in weeks, and they've started to tease him about spending all his time with his girlfriend.

This weekend his friends are going to a basketball game, and they invited Jamal along. But Jamal had already told Lauren that he'd go to a party with her, so he feels he has to go. He's angry, though, because he may be losing his friends. Jamal *really* wants to skip the party and go to the game with his friends instead.

#### **Lauren**

Tomorrow night Lauren's best friend is having a party. Lauren really wants to go, and Jamal said that he would go with her. Her friends are impressed that she has a boyfriend, and she can't wait to walk into the party together. In the last couple of days, Lauren has tried to talk to Jamal about the party, but he seems angry about it. Once he even said that he didn't understand why she was so excited about a "stupid" party. Lauren just thought he was in a bad mood.

### **The Script: Jamal and Lauren**

Today is the day before the party and the basketball game. Lauren calls Jamal to find out what time he's going to pick her up for the party.

**Lauren:** Hi, Jamal. What time will you be picking me up tomorrow?

**Jamal:** I'm not. I'm going to the basketball game.

**Lauren:** What? But we're supposed to go to the party! I'll look stupid going by myself!

**Jamal:** It's a stupid party anyway. I told you I didn't want to go.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What can Lauren do to **Stay** calm?
2. What can Jamal do to **Stay** calm?
3. What questions could Lauren **Ask** Jamal to help her understand the situation better?
4. What questions could Jamal **Ask** Lauren to help him understand the situation better?
5. What could Lauren say to Jamal to let him know how she **Feels** and why?
6. What could Jamal say to Lauren to let her know how he **Feels** and why?
7. What ideas could they **Exchange** to solve the problem in a way that makes them both happy?



## Recap

- People who are dating feel angry at each other sometimes. How we deal with anger can make the difference between a good and a bad dating relationship.
- All relationships have conflict at some point in time. Learning skills for settling disagreements may keep a conflict from turning into a bad dating situation.
- Skills for managing anger and settling disagreements are useful for managing conflict in all kinds of relationships, not just dating relationships.
- Caregivers, in your discussions with your teen, you may have discovered that he or she is in an abusive relationship. If so, please refer to the resources listed on page 16 of booklet 1. Remember, the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline is 1-866-331-9474, and the National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).

## Next Steps

If you have received all five Families for Safe Dates activity booklets at once, these are your next steps:

1. Continue to practice skills for managing anger and settling disagreements.
2. Complete booklet 3, Recognizing Dating Abuse, which includes activities to help teens and caregivers:
  - recognize abusive dating
  - identify some of the harmful consequences of teen dating abuse
  - recognize some of the things abusers do to control dating partners
  - consider ways to handle abusive dating situations

If your family is participating in Families for Safe Dates through an organization that will be calling you after you complete each booklet, these are your next steps:

1. Continue to practice skills for managing anger and settling disagreements.
2. Write down any questions you have about dating abuse or this booklet's activities to ask the health educator who will be calling you soon.
3. Booklet 3 (described above) will be sent to you about three days after your telephone conversation with the health educator.

## Answers for Activity 2, Part B: Michelle and Kevin Script

1. **A** and **F**: Michelle **Asked** Kevin a question to better understand the situation. She also asked Kevin about his **Feelings**.

2. **F** and **A**: Kevin told Michelle what he was **Feeling** and why. He also **Asked** Michelle a question ("What's that all about?") to better understand the situation. It would have been good if Kevin had used one of the immediate calming strategies from activity 1 to **Stay** calm.

3. **S**: Instead of yelling back at Kevin, Michelle took a deep breath and paused. This is a great way to **Stay** calm. She also provided Kevin with information to help him better understand the situation.

4. **F**: Michelle told Kevin how she was **Feeling** by using an "I statement." She also provided more details to help him understand the situation.

5. **F** and **A**: Kevin told Michelle how he **Feels**. He also **Asked** her a question to help him understand the situation better.

6. **F**: Michelle told Kevin how she **Feels** and what's important to her. She also opened the door to discuss solutions ("What can we do?").

7–11. **E**: Michelle and Kevin are both **Exchanging** ideas for a possible solution.

## Possible Answers for Activity 3: Jamal and Lauren

### 1 and 2. What can Lauren and Jamal do to Stay calm?

They have many options. For example, taking a deep breath could help them both calm down and think more clearly about what they wanted to say. For more ideas, see the immediate calming strategies listed in activity 1.

### 3. What questions could Lauren Ask Jamal to help her understand the situation better?

Lauren could ask Jamal, "Why don't you want to go to the party?" or "What's bothering you?" By asking these questions and listening to Jamal's answers, Lauren will be able to understand his side better.

### 4. What questions could Jamal Ask Lauren to help him understand the situation better?

Jamal could ask Lauren, "Why is the party so important to you?" or "Why do you think you'll look stupid without me?" Lauren's answers to these questions could help Jamal understand her side better.

### 5. What could Lauren say to Jamal to let him know how she Feels and why?

She could use an "I statement" such as, "I feel upset when you change plans without telling me because I'm afraid you don't care about me." Letting Jamal know how she feels will help him to understand her better.

### 6. What could Jamal say to Lauren to let her know how he Feels and why?

He could use an "I statement" such as, "I feel frustrated when I don't get to spend time with my friends because I'm afraid I'm losing them."

### 7. What ideas could they Exchange to solve the problem in a way that makes them both happy?

Lauren could suggest that in the future, in addition to planning time together, they should also plan things to do separately with their friends. Jamal could suggest that instead of going to the party, he could meet Lauren's friends another time. Another solution: they could both go to the party, since Jamal said he'd go, but then he'd join his friends for the next two basketball games. Or Lauren and Jamal could go to the party together after the basketball game is over. All of these solutions are good because they respect each person's feelings and wishes.