

THE YOUTH MOVEMENT

# Emotional Intelligence Quick-Start

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A short, practical guide & workbook for teens —  
and the parents who want to help them grow

## What's inside

Five core EI skills explained in plain language, a one-page teen workbook to practice them, and a parent coaching cheat-sheet — everything you need in one sitting.

For middle school through 12th grade · Use it yourself or together

# What Emotional Intelligence Is — and Why It Matters

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Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to notice, understand, and manage emotions — your own and other people's. It is not about being calm all the time or hiding feelings. It is a set of skills that can be taught and practiced, just like reading or shooting free throws.<sup>1</sup> Decades of research show that young people who build these skills do better in school, get along better with others, and report stronger well-being.<sup>2</sup>

This matters most during the teen years. The emotional part of the brain develops faster than the part that handles planning and impulse control, which keeps maturing into the mid-twenties. That gap is normal — and it is exactly why practicing EI now makes such a difference.<sup>3</sup>

## The Five Core Skills

- Self-Awareness — naming what you feel, and why. Putting a feeling into words actually calms the brain's alarm system.<sup>4</sup>
- Self-Management — handling strong emotions without doing something you'll regret. Tools like slow breathing genuinely lower stress.<sup>5</sup>
- Empathy — sensing what someone else feels and seeing things from their side.
- Relationship Skills — listening, speaking up honestly, and working through conflict.
- Responsible Decisions — pausing to think about consequences before you act.

### The one move that powers all five

Name it to tame it. The moment a feeling shows up, label it: "I'm frustrated," "I'm nervous." That single step turns down the intensity and buys you a few seconds to choose your next move instead of reacting on autopilot.<sup>4</sup>

1. CASEL, What Is the CASEL Framework — [casel.org](https://casel.org). 2. CASEL, What Does the Research Say — [casel.org](https://casel.org).

3. Stanford Children's Health, Understanding the Teen Brain — [stanfordchildrens.org](https://stanfordchildrens.org). 4. Lieberman et al. (2007), Affect Labeling — [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

5. Balban et al. (2023), Stanford Medicine, Cyclic Sighing & Anxiety — [med.stanford.edu](https://med.stanford.edu).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Name it to tame it**

Think of a moment this week when you felt a strong emotion. What was the feeling, and what set it off?

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**2. Your reset button**

Pick one calm-down move you'll actually use next time — slow breathing, a short walk, music, or stepping away. Write it here:

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**3. See it from their side**

Think of someone you disagreed with recently. What might they have been feeling that you missed?

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**4. One honest sentence**

Practice an "I" statement for something on your mind: "I feel \_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_."

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**This Week's Challenge**

Use "name it to tame it" once a day for five days. Notice what changes when you put the feeling into words first. Jot a quick note each night — even one word counts.

# Parent Coaching Cheat-Sheet

You don't have to fix your teen's feelings — your job is to coach them through. Research on "emotion coaching" shows that parents who treat emotions as a chance to connect and teach raise kids who regulate emotions better and have stronger relationships.<sup>6</sup>

## Five steps when emotions run high

- Notice the emotion early — especially the smaller signs before things boil over.
- See it as an opportunity to connect and teach, not an inconvenience to shut down.
- Listen and validate — "That sounds really frustrating" lands better than "Calm down."
- Help name the feeling — offer words: "Are you more hurt or angry right now?"
- Problem-solve together — set limits on behavior, but brainstorm solutions with them, not for them.<sup>6</sup>

## Validate, don't dismiss

| Try this                                      | Instead of               |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| "I can see why that upset you."               | "You're overreacting."   |
| "Want to talk about it or just sit a minute?" | "Why didn't you just..." |
| "That's a hard spot. What feels fair to you?" | "It's not a big deal."   |

### When something feels bigger

Coaching is for everyday ups and downs. If you notice ongoing sadness, withdrawal, talk of self-harm, or anything that worries you, reach out to a counselor, doctor, or mental-health professional. In the U.S. you can call or text 988 anytime for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

6. The Gottman Institute, Emotion Coaching & Parenting Teens — [gottman.com](https://www.gottman.com); [gottman.com/parenting/teens](https://www.gottman.com/parenting/teens).

# Keep It Going

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Emotional intelligence grows with small, repeated reps — not one big conversation. A few easy habits keep the momentum:

- Name feelings out loud at home, including your own — it makes the skill normal.
- Keep the workbook nearby and revisit one prompt a week.
- Celebrate the pause — notice out loud when your teen handled a hard moment well.
- Model the reset — let them see you take a breath before responding.

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose.”

— widely attributed to Viktor Frankl

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## Ready for the full journey?

*This quick-start is your first step. The Youth Movement offers full programs in emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and more — with facilitator guides, teen worksheets, and certificates. Reach out to bring them to your family, classroom, or group.*

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