

Protect Child Relationships: Age-Band Support Guide

For Our Children and Families - practical public-use support for moments when families need calmer next steps. Not legal advice. Start with safety first.

Public-use guide. Parenting and family-stability information only. Not legal advice.

Children show loyalty pressure and conflict strain differently at different ages. Use the child's stage, not just the adult conflict, to decide what helps.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Common signs:

- Clinginess, regression, sleep trouble, body complaints, tantrums, fear at transitions.

What helps:

- Predictable routine.
- Very simple explanations.
- Familiar objects at exchanges.
- Fewer adult words, more safety and repetition.
- Calm handoffs and visible next steps.

SCHOOL-AGE

Common signs:

- Worry, somatic complaints, trying to be good, trying to fix things, hiding information, school spillover.

What helps:

- Clear permission to love safe people without choosing.
- One school update if needed.
- Short factual answers.
- Let the child be a child, not a messenger.
- Keep homework, sleep, supplies, and appointments steady.

PRETEEN AND TEEN

Common signs:

- Withdrawal, hard sides, contempt language borrowed from adults, shutdown, intense privacy mixed with adult concerns, over-functioning.

What helps:

- Respectful direct communication.
- Clear boundaries: the teen does not have to manage adult conflict.
- More voice in ordinary planning without making them the decision-maker for adult disputes.
- Keep safe adults and school/provider supports visible.
- Separate normal teen privacy from adult-driven pressure or cutoff patterns.

AT ANY AGE

What usually helps:

- Lower conflict exposure.
- Safer routines.
- Clean logistics.
- Short shared updates.
- Protection of safe stable nurturing relationships.

What usually harms:

- Interrogation.
- Role reversal.
- Loyalty tests.
- Denigration.
- Using school, providers, or handoffs as leverage.