Connect Before You Correct

A parent and caregiver conversation guide for hard moments with children and teens.

Pause before the lecture

Start with one calm sentence: “I want to understand what happened. I am ready to listen.” Regulation comes before problem-solving.

Ask a question that opens the door

Try “What was the hardest part of today?” or “Do you want advice, help, or someone to listen?” Avoid demanding details in front of others.

Validate without excusing harmful behavior

You can say “I understand why you were upset” while still maintaining clear expectations around safety and respect. Feeling heard is not the same as having no boundaries.

Make a small collaborative plan

Name one change the young person will try, one action the adult will take, and a specific time to reconnect. Child action: _____ Adult action: _____ Check-in date: _____.

Look for patterns, not labels

Notice changes in sleep, friendships, attendance, or behavior and ask about context. Neither a worksheet nor an assembly substitutes for evaluation when concerning signs persist.

Find support early

For ongoing distress, bullying, safety concerns, or impairment, connect with the school counselor, pediatrician, or qualified mental health professional. If urgent safety risk arises, follow your local emergency or crisis protocol.

Education and self-reflection only. This worksheet does not diagnose or treat a mental health condition. If safety is a concern, seek qualified support. In the U.S., call or text 988 in a crisis.