

HEALTHY MINDS
A WEEKLY COLUMN ALL ABOUT MENTAL WELLNESS
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Resolving Family Conflict



A husband and wife are at a church picnic and the husband is discussing an important business deal with a well-to-do church member. He is nervous and he asks his wife to get him a glass of ice tea. As she is about to head towards the food table, a friend stops and greets her; she hadn't seen her friend since she moved away more than a year ago and she stops to give her a hug. Spotting this, the husband becomes visibly irritated, snaps his fingers loudly, and says, "I said NOW, woman!"

A middle-school student, always a good and reliable son, begins hanging out with some boys that seem rowdy and ill-mannered. When he starts staying out late with his new friends, missing homework, and playing hooky, his parents question him and his answers are evasive and rude.

A family has one working TV in the house and they no longer have the same preferences. They argue over what to watch, and the disagreements sometimes get harsh; the family is divided over this issue.

Family conflicts are found in almost every relationship, when individuals have different standards, needs, desires, or they simply change over time, as they mature. Hurtful remarks and thoughtless actions can lead to great harm within the family home. In this hard economic period, financial matters often play a key role in conflict; differing ideas on how to discipline children, norms of child behavior, and problems sharing space can also cause conflict. Marriage partners sometimes do not meet their mutual needs for companionship, affection, and intimacy. You can surely add your own points of disagreement.

In order to resolve conflict we must communicate effectively with each other, with a genuine willingness to find a solution that will suit everyone. Mutual respect and compromise is essential. When the family resolves conflict, everyone wins.

In order to communicate effectively several key rules must be followed. 1) Even though you may have a strong point of view, speak in a moderate tone; 2) Treat the other person with respect; 3) State your point of view honestly and clearly; 4) Listen attentively to the other person and don't interrupt; 5) Tell how you feel and understand the other person's feelings as well. 6) Don't be defensive about what you hear.

How does conflict work in your family? Are there certain issues that always come up? Does conflict occur every day? Does it occur at a particular time or

during a particular occasion? Is the conflict serious? Are there loud arguments? Is there physical abuse or fighting? Do certain family members raise their voices, slam doors, or cry?

Here are some ways to help resolve family conflict. 1) Work on solving it together. It involves all of you and needs all of you to fix it. 2) Make rules of conduct for discussing topics that may lead to conflict and write them down. Such rules might include: no talking out of turn; no interruptions; no name-calling; et cetera. 3) For issues that keep coming up, develop a plan of action that includes everyone in the family that will be affected by the decision made. 4) Seek information about family conflict, including specific information about raising adolescent children, marriage conflicts, and other issues, in the local library, in bookstores, on websites, and in discussion groups that sometimes come up. 5) If all else seems ineffective, or if a family member becomes physically or emotionally destructive, by all means seek the help of a counselor with whom you and your family can work.

Before you fly off the handle, take a moment to think if the issue is worth your anger or anxiety. It is more important to solve the problem than to win the argument. Look for alternative solutions that suit everyone. Don't be afraid to ask for professional help if you are stuck. If you all show each other mutual respect and are truly willing to find a solution, you will succeed.

TIP OF THE WEEK: Here is some homework for all of you who wish you resolve family conflict. With pen and paper list in detail the following items. 1) What exactly is the issue that is causing the problem; 2) Write out all of the facts; 3) Write out the possible causes; 4) Write out the possible solutions; 5) Working together, choose the best solution; 6) Decide together how best to make this solution work for you; 7) After working on the situation for awhile, refer back to this list to see how you are doing.