

## **CONFLICT AND FAMILY LIFE**

### ***Parent - Teen Relationships***

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Some things to remember:

1. Conflict is a natural part of growth and family living. Therefore, it is inevitable. Conflict arises in part because all of us see people and situations differently.
2. Conflicts usually emerge as a symptom but we usually think of them as the problem. When people find themselves in conflict they usually have some need that is unfulfilled. It is better to look below the symptom and discover what need the person is striving to fulfill. Resolve the problem rather than just the symptom only.
3. Most conflict is not dealt openly because most people have not been taught effective ways of resolving conflict. Many families ignore minor conflicts to keep from rocking the boat. When major conflict arises people tend to avoid it or cannot solve it because they have not learned how to deal with minor conflicts.
4. Conflict provides opportunity for growth in relationships. It can be helpful if used in the right way but can also be destructive if used at the wrong time or in the wrong manner.
5. Unresolved conflicts interfere with growth and satisfying relationships. Barriers are erected when conflicts are not resolved. We tend to become defensive in order not to be hurt. Defensive reaction places a strain upon any relationship.

### **HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS IN MY FAMILY**

1. Recognize conflict issues. No one has to look for conflicts, but as a disagreement arises, accept it as an opportunity to gain understanding of yourself and the other person, and consider it a time of growth. Your attitude toward the problem is crucial. Your pessimism or optimism will influence the outcome. If you don't allow for the expression of it directly, it will come out in other ways, which are often destructive.
2. Listen carefully to the other person. Any changes desired by a family member have to be heard and understood. If we listen to another we soon notice that he begins to take us seriously and listen to us. If you as a parent are a true listener, others will begin to listen to you. If you as a teenager listen to your parents, they may listen to you. Listen to others as you would have them listen to you.
3. Select an appropriate time. It is very important to select time that will allow for the greatest understanding and cooperative effort. Have you ever tried to solve conflicts when you were hungry, physically exhausted, emotionally upset, or had a limited amount of time? It doesn't work too well. Be sure that the subject is defined so all of you know what you need to talk about.

4. Specifically define the conflict. How do you define the problem? how do you think the other person defines the problem. In your opinion, what behaviors contribute to the conflict: What behaviors do you think the other person sees as contributing to the conflict. What are the issues of agreement and disagreement in this conflict? The more narrowly the conflict is defined, the easier conflict resolution will be. Share your concern in private with the other person not in front of others so you do not cause embarrassment.
5. Identify your own contribution to the problem. In resolving a conflict you are basically saying to another person that "we" have a problem. You may think that the other person is a part of the problem, but does he think so? The way in which you approach that person and the words you use will be very important here. If you blame, attack, or point an accusing finger at the other person, you will probably get a defensive reaction. When you accept some responsibility for a problem, the other sees a willingness to cooperate and will probably be much more open to the discussion.

\*\*\*As you consider what you are going to say to the other person, here are some practical steps to follow:

- a. Choose a word that best indicates what you want to talk about.
- b. State the word or subject you want to talk about in one complete sentence. Be precise and specific. Try not to blame, ridicule, or attack the other person. Don't overload them with too much information all at once. As you discuss the problem you must state as explicitly as possible the other person's behaviors that you find difficult to accept and state as explicitly as possible your behaviors that the other person probably finds unacceptable.
- c. Comparing this person's actions and behavior with the failings of others does little to help solve the problems you are concerned about.
- d. Forget the past. Talk about the present issue and make no reference to past difficulties.
- e. Share only one complaint. It is too easy for the other person to feel dumped upon if they receive a barrage of problems all at the same time.
- f. Be sure to suggest in a non angry, non demanding, non judgmental way some of the possible and realistic solutions that could be implemented.
- g. Be sure you let the other person share their feelings and ideas about the problem that you are bringing to their attention. Even if they respond in anger to what you have said, their response is no reason for you to become angry.

6. Identify several possible solutions. Once each person has identified their contributions to a problem or conflict it becomes clear that a behavioral change would be to everyone's advantage. The next step - the solution of the problem - is not always clear, however. Now is the time for individual and joint brainstorming. Each should think of as many solutions to the problem as possible. These should be changes of behavior for yourself and for the other person. It is important to propose more than one possible solution as the greater the number the more likely you will find one that both will respond to and accept. Posing more than one solution also helps you to become more flexible and avoid the tendency to think in terms of "either", which hinders problem solving. As you look for solutions be sure to consider those that meet your needs and the needs of the other person.
7. Decide on a mutually acceptable solution. After identifying the possible solutions you have listed, evaluate them and make a choice.
8. Implement new behaviors. Concentrate on your own behavior changes, allowing the other person to work on his own changes. Don't say, "I'll do this if ....." Your change does not depend upon what the other person does. Resolving conflicts is not a matter of winning or losing. By using this problem solving approach, family members may find a creative solution in which all are satisfied. Remember that although conflict is inevitable it is on time for growth. It is important that we are open to correction and valid criticism - defensiveness can hamper this growth.