



**Toolkit for Parenting Teenagers**  
**Tip Sheet #5: Managing Family Conflict**

Disagreements are a normal and healthy part of all family relationships. It's common for family members to hold different opinions on topics or experience times when some members are not getting along. What's important is maintaining and strengthening your family relationships even through times of conflict. Below are some tips that you can use to manage family conflict in your home.

- 1. Understand everyone's conflict style.** Every member of your family has their own unique way of handling conflict. Some members avoid disagreements at all costs, while others seek a resolution as soon as possible. Taking into consideration each family member's conflict management style will allow everyone to feel comfortable while working together in addressing a conflict.
- 2. Establish ground rules.** Setting ground rules will ensure that everyone knows to stay within the agreed upon boundaries of arguing. Decide what words and actions are unacceptable during a conflict and make sure to be specific and give examples.
- 3. The Do's.** Everyone should try to be as calm, respectful, and cooperative as possible when entering into a disagreement. The goal is to maintain self-control throughout the entire process so that you can monitor what you say and do. Remaining in control will also help you assess when it may be time for a timeout or end the conversation and meet again later.
- 4. The Don'ts.** Disagreements can easily head toward a downward spiral; therefore, it is essential you avoid these pitfalls as much as possible. Blaming, name calling, sarcasm, accusations, screaming, sulking, and judging family members makes it even more difficult to resolve family conflict. Family members will be less likely to listen actively and be cooperative if they feel they have been disrespected or threatened in any way.
- 5. Focus on one issue.** It can be tempting to bring up the past or other unresolved issues when having a disagreement, especially if you believe they are related to the current issue. Stick to the issue at hand to avoid amplifying the intensity and the direction of the current conversation.

6. **Use positive communication skills.** Communication skills play a vital role in the success of a disagreement. Becoming aware of everyone's communication style will enable you to create a space where family members can feel comfortable to share their point of view.

7. **Maintain emotional control.** Things can get intense during a disagreement, and it might feel instinctual to defend yourself by attacking others. You should make every attempt to control your emotions before the situation gets out of control. Keep in mind that negative comments and behaviors toward others don't help resolve conflict and can't be taken back once done.

8. **Work toward a solution.** It is unrealistic to think every family member will be on the same page during every conflict. More than likely, you will have to negotiate to reach a compromise or maybe even agree to disagree. While you talk things through, try to include everyone in the conversation and give their suggestions the benefit of the doubt.

9. **Seek professional help.** Physical, emotional, and verbal abuse should never be a part of family conflict. Any form of intimidation or attack should be taken seriously by seeking help from qualified professionals. Qualified family counselors are trained to help families resolve problems in their relationships through guidance and insight that is specific to your situation. It is best to seek counseling as soon a serious issue arises, although you can seek counseling at any point in time.

10. **Establish reconnection.** Some family members may need to take time to cool off after a family conflict. Be willing to respect their space, but also make sure to establish reconnection with every family member when the time is right. As a family, it's important to come together and discuss ways in which you have learned and grown from managing conflict.