

Managing family conflict



TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Conflict is a normal part of everyday life.

How conflicts are handled, not the fact that they happen, determines if they are constructive or destructive – that is, whether they're helpful or hurtful to a relationship.

In fact, being able to express conflict in a relationship is a sign that you are feeling safe enough to do so.

Conflict is the recognition of differences which require negotiation. Problems are conflicts that don't get fixed or sorted out.

Conflicts can actually strengthen and improve relationships. However, too much conflict in a relationship can be pretty hard going!

How can I have stable and healthy relationships?

Good and stable relationships need you to have more positive than negative experiences.

According to the Gottman Institute, which applies leading-edge research to how relationships work, a ratio of 5 to 1 of positive to negative moments is a good measure for maintaining a healthy intimate relationship.

What that means is that for every negative moment in the relationship, there should be 5 positive experiences.

Want to know more? Read our healthy relationships tips at www.rav.org.au/resources

Why is there more conflict between my parents and I, now, than there was before?

As adolescents you start to increase and embrace independent thinking, beliefs, identity and values. These may be similar and/or different from those of your parents. It's also a time when you tend to spend more time with our friends and peers than with your parents.

The relationship between parents and adolescents may change and new issues may arise that you and your parents haven't experienced before. So, there are just more issues to sort out between parents and young people!

Being a teenager is sometimes shown in the media as a time of big headaches for parents and young people. However, for young people, adolescence is, in fact, a time for courage and creativity (Seigel, 2014).

It is also a unique time for you to develop relationship skills around negotiating differences and resolving conflict. These skills are crucial for relationships throughout your life.

So, sorting out family conflict can actually be a great learning experience for you, even if it's tough at the time. It can help you to develop the skills and attitudes you need for the healthy close relationships of your future.

The key to a healthy adolescence is gaining gradual independence from your parents, but also staying connected to them. It's important that you and your parents keep the lines of connection and communication open.

You may not always find it easy to do this though, so if you feel like there's so much conflict with your parents that you're feeling distressed or isolated, it's important to get help early (see page 2).

Relationships Australia
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! How can I resolve conflict with my parents?

Consider these questions and strategies to help manage and resolve conflict.

1. Is now the right time?

Before you raise a tricky issue, always ask yourself, 'Is this a good time to bring this up?' 'Can my parent/carer give me their full attention?' 'Am I feeling calm enough to talk about this difficult issue?'

If the answer to any of these questions is no, think about raising the issue at another time that will mean you end up with a better result.

2. Where did this conflict come from?

Sometimes conflict comes up unexpectedly, so if you find yourself in the middle of an unexpected conflict or argument, ask yourself the same question: 'Am I in a good enough place to sort this tricky issue out?'

There is evidence that once your body floods with adrenalin and your heart races to a certain point, you lose your ability to resolve conflict. So once you are feeling very angry, upset or frozen, it's a good time to take a break!

3. 'They just don't get me!'

Sometimes it's not getting what you want, but feeling heard and understood, that will help you to feel better about a situation.

Conflict is shared between people, so just as it's important for your parents/carers to listen to you, it's just as important that you do your bit in trying to understand where they're coming from and what their perspectives are.

4. It's not what you say, but how you say it

Although it matters what you say, sometimes the tone of your voice and how you say things can make a big difference to how conflict is resolved.

Try to use assertive language, and listen to your tone of voice. Try filling in these gaps to explain how you're feeling about an issue:

'I feel _____
about _____.'
What I need, or would like, is _____
_____.'

5. Compromise

Sometimes you have to be willing to compromise and think about a number of options you'd be willing to accept.

At other times though, parents have boundaries or issues that they're not able or willing to negotiate on. While frustrating, accept that these are usually about your safety.

Need more help?

Remember that you don't have to deal with things on your own.

If any of the information we've talked about here has concerned you, or you'd like to chat to someone about what's going on for you, help is available.

You can start by talking to a trusted adult such as a parent, carer, family member, teacher or school counsellor and telling them how you're feeling.

If you feel unsafe at any time, call 000 (triple zero). For 24/7 support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

To make an appointment to chat to one of our counsellors, visit www.rav.org.au/counselling

To find other organisations that can help, visit www.rav.org.au/resources/youth-services

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.

Conflict is normal. What counts is how you deal with it.
