

What is conflict?



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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. But too much conflict in a relationship can be pretty hard going!

Stable 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 five positive experiences.

Why is there often more conflict between you and parents now than any other time growing up?

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 just haven't experienced before.

So there's 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 between parents and young people, but in fact for you, young people, adolescence is 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.

Check out our *useful stuff* page at www.connectedspace.com.au/useful-stuff for where you can get help.

How can you resolve conflict with your parents?

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

1. Is now the time?
Before you raise a tricky issue, always ask yourself, is this a good time to bring this up? Can my mum, dad and/or 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.





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Remember

- Conflict is normal. It's how you manage conflict that determines if it's helpful or not.
- In all relationships, aim for a ratio of 5:1 positive to negative experiences.
- Keep in mind our useful strategies and questions to ask yourself to help manage and resolve conflict.

2. Where did this 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 is not about 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 or carers to listen to you, it's just as important you do your bit in trying to understand where they're coming from and what their perspective is.

4. "It's not what you say but the way 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. Sometimes 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, and help is available.

Deciding to get help is a sometimes tough but brave first step in dealing with conflict. 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 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. Visit www.connectedspace.com.au/need-help-now or call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800.



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