



NEWSLETTER

HOPE Issue 12 - When Your Home is a Battle Zone: How to Resolve Conflicts Peacefully October 24, 2016

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There are times when a home can feel like a battlefield, with constant tension and fighting. One mom described life with her son this way: “I can usually tell what kind of day it’s going to be from the minute he gets up. If it’s going to be a bad day, I walk around on eggshells, waiting for what’s going to ignite his fuse.”

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Conflict is something we often think of as negative. It brings to mind arguing and anger. In reality, conflict is a normal part of life. It occurs when there are different points of view and different opinions on how things should be done. It’s impossible to go through life without experiencing conflict: in families, friendships, the workplace, politics...basically in every area of life. The important thing is how we handle and resolve our differences.

The first place our children experience conflict, not surprisingly, is at home. The skills you teach your child in resolving conflicts will be what they will use at school, with peers and throughout their lives. We never stop learning and developing skills, but childhood is the place where the foundation begins.

5 Tips to End the War and Call a Truce

1. Be aware of your emotions. In any situation, the point where we stop being logical about resolving conflict is when our emotions become engaged. If you’re feeling angry, frustrated or afraid, take a Parent Time Out. If you choose to take a few moments to catch your breath or regain your composure, it does *not* mean your child “wins.” It simply means you are choosing to de-escalate a situation that is becoming emotionally charged.

2. Stay focused on the issue. Often in conflict you can find yourself way off track and wonder, “How in the world did we start out talking about curfew and end up arguing about how I never do anything for my child?!” When you find your child – or yourself – going off on a tangent, bring the focus back to the issue at hand by simply stating, “Let’s stay focused on the subject, which is (fill in the blank).”

3. Think of it as resolving...not winning. Fights are “won.” Conflict is “resolved.” Resolving a conflict doesn’t necessarily mean you will be “right” or “wrong.” It may mean agreeing to disagree, depending on the issue. Also, help your child recognize that resolving conflict doesn’t mean he or she will get what they want. It might mean understanding that sometimes rules are rules and that’s just the way it is.

If your daughter’s curfew is midnight and she wants to stay out until 2 a.m., conflict resolution doesn’t necessarily mean you “give in” and let her stay out later. It may mean you compromise and allow her to stay out half an hour later. Or it may mean, as her parent, you decide midnight is late enough. That’s how it is in life. I might think the speed limit should be 90 miles per hour (not really, but for the sake of argument), but the police officer who pulls me over will likely believe the speed limit should be the legally posted 55 mph. The officer will not stand and fight or argue with me, trying to “win” and make me understand his point of view. We will need to agree to disagree. The conflict resolution: I’ll have a ticket to pay.

4. Try to Make conflicts with your child a “teachable moment.” We like to refer to *parenting with intention*. Whenever conflict arises with your child, it’s an opportunity to teach him skills. Remember your intention: to arm your child with skills he can use not just at home, but with others, whenever he encounters conflict. When you stand and argue or “fight,” he is learning that the nature of conflict is negative and charged with emotion, often ending in hurt feelings and resentment. He’s learning that the point is to “win.” But in order to be successful in life, he will have to approach things differently and work to resolve conflicts instead of win every fight if he wants to keep a marriage, a job or friendships.

5. Strengthen your own conflict resolution skills. Take some time to examine your own habits when it comes to dealing with conflict. We all have things we fall back on, usually what we learned in childhood. It may be yelling, giving in to others to avoid feeling uncomfortable or anxious, digging in and refusing to see another point of view, overreacting or personalizing someone else being upset. Strengthen your own positive conflict resolution skills so you can help your child develop them as well. Sometimes we expect our kids to use skills we don’t practice ourselves, without even realizing it. Avoid the trap of “Do as I say, not as I do!”

There’s No Deadline for Personal Growth

The most significant tool you have in impacting your child is your own behavior. It’s the only thing you have complete control over. Your child cannot *make* you stand and argue with her. It may feel that way, but think twice before handing over that kind of power. If you’ve spent years arguing with your child it might feel like you’re in a hopeless situation. Even if there’s been a pattern of hurtful fighting in your home in the past, it’s never too late to make changes. Even yesterday – just one day ago – is in the past now. As the saying goes, “Life always offers you a second chance. It’s called tomorrow.”

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