

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Cooling Relationship Conflicts

Your partner and you have not been speaking for two days. A sibling is giving you the silent treatment. Perhaps a family gathering has been canceled because of a conflict between family members.

Conflict is bound to happen occasionally with both family and friends. After all, no two people are the same. To develop effective problem solving skills you need to have a game plan to handle conflict when it arises and work with others to make it happen. Test out these tried and true relationship savers:

Tackle the problem. The first step to managing conflict is to address problems before they escalate. Avoid discussing hot topics when you are angry, stressed out or arguing. Pick a time and place where all people involved can relax and discuss the issue calmly. Better yet, create pre-determined action plans for dealing with disagreements with your family. This can include rules such as taking time-outs when you're angry, or vetoing yelling in front of children.

Show respect. Be respectful of each other's opinion even when you disagree. It can be difficult to show respect when you're upset, but don't disregard feelings and concerns. Treat people the way you want to be treated.

Facilitate understanding. Remember that understanding someone's point of view does not mean that you necessarily agree with him or her. Critical to resolving conflict is ensuring that the other person knows that you understand how they feel. If they keep repeating the same points over and over again, that is THE sign that should be telling you that they are not feeling heard.

Be a peacemaker. You are coming together to solve a problem or find a solution, so act like it. Keep a light and friendly tone of voice. You can tell people how you feel without yelling or using inappropriate language. Body language is important so avoid rolling your eyes, crossing your arms or tapping your foot. Instead show you came to actively listen: make eye contact, never assign blame and repeat concerns back to the other person to ensure clarity.

Focus on the issues not the person. Do not raise what you may perceive as the other person's faults, or personality traits or habits. Stick to the issue you disagree on and make sure not to bring up past arguments. When you make a point, use "I" statements. You might say, "I would like you to help me do the dishes," instead of, "You never do the dishes." This way, you're telling the person how you feel, not without making them feel defensive. Make sure to stay on track during the discussion and, if you feel a need to, take a break.

Create a win-win solution. Try to focus on problem solving instead of winning the argument. Keep this in mind and you'll create a win-win situation. Take turns speaking and offering solutions. If unsure about a decision you've both agreed on, set a trial period. Afterwards, come back and discuss progress. This gives you a chance to assess not only the solution, but the way you came to it.

Conflict is a normal and even healthy part of any relationship. However, if you find yourself constantly battling with someone, take the steps to identify the underlining issue and use the tips above to resolve disagreements quickly and painlessly.

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