Family conflict
Summary

- Conflict can happen when family members have different views or beliefs that clash.
- Peaceful resolution depends on negotiation and respect for the other person’s point of view.
- Seek professional advice if you think you need help.

Conflict can happen when family members have different views or beliefs that clash. Sometimes conflict can occur when people misunderstand each other and jump to the wrong conclusion. Issues of conflict that are not resolved peacefully can lead to arguments and resentment.

It is normal to disagree with each other from time to time. Occasional conflict is part of family life. However, ongoing conflict can be stressful and damaging to relationships. Some people find it difficult to manage their feelings and become intentionally hurtful, aggressive or even violent.

Communicating in a positive way can help reduce conflict so that family members can reach a peaceful resolution. This usually means that everyone agrees to a compromise or agrees to disagree.

Sometimes, strong emotions or the power imbalances that can be present in relationships are difficult to resolve and can only be addressed in a counselling situation.

Common causes of family conflict

It is well recognised that some of the stages a family goes through can cause conflict. These may include:

- Learning to live as a new couple
- Birth of a baby
- Birth of other children
- A child going to school
- A child becoming a young person
- A young person becoming an adult.

Each of these stages can create new and different stresses and potential conflict.

Changes in the family situation can also take a toll on the family and contribute to conflict. This may include events such as:

- Separation or divorce
- Moving to a new house or country
- Travelling long distances to work
- Commuting interstate for work.
- Change in financial circumstances.

The opinions, values and needs of each parent can also change and they may find they are no longer compatible.

Agreeing to negotiate

Usually, our first angry impulse is to push the point that we are right and win the argument at any cost. Finding a peaceful resolution can be difficult, if not impossible, when both parties stubbornly stick to their guns. It helps if everyone decides as a family to try listening to each other and negotiating instead.

Suggestions include:

- Work out if the issue is worth fighting over.
- Try to separate the problem from the person.
- Try to cool off first if you feel too angry to talk calmly.
- Keep in mind that the idea is to resolve the conflict, not win the argument.
- Remember that the other party isn’t obliged to always agree with you on everything.
- Define the problem and stick to the topic.
- Respect the other person’s point of view by paying attention and listening.
- Talk clearly and reasonably.
Try to find points of common ground.
Agree to disagree.

Try to listen
Conflict can escalate when the people involved are too angry to listen to each other. Misunderstandings fuel arguments. Suggestions include:

- Try to stay calm.
- Try to put emotions aside.
- Don’t interrupt the other person while they are speaking.
- Actively listen to what they are saying and what they mean.
- Check that you understand them by asking questions.
- Communicate your side of the story clearly and honestly.
- Resist the urge to bring up other unresolved but unrelated issues.

Work as a team
Once both parties understand the views and feelings of the other, you can work out a solution together. Suggestions include:

- Come up with as many possible solutions as you can.
- Be willing to compromise.
- Make sure everyone clearly understands the chosen solution.
- Once the solution is decided on, stick to it.
- Write it down as a ‘contract’, if necessary.

Professional advice
There are services available to help family members work through difficult issues of conflict. Seek professional advice if you think you need some assistance.

Where to get help
- Your doctor
- Parentline Tel. 13 22 89
- Family Relationship Advice Line Tel. 1800 050 321 Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm, Saturday, 10am to 4pm www.familyrelationships.gov.au
- Other parents
- Family counsellor

Things to remember
- Conflict can happen when family members have different views or beliefs that clash.
- Peaceful resolution depends on negotiation and respect for the other person’s point of view.
- Seek professional advice if you think you need help.

References
- Conflict and negotiation, Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service, Department for Community Development, South Australian Government. More information here.
- Relationships with parents, Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service, Department for Community Development, South Australian Government. More information here.

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Relationships

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Relationships basics
- Developing relationships
- Family relationships
- Separation and divorce
- Remarriage and repartnering
- Relationship difficulties
- Violence and abuse
- Work and relationships
- Getting help

Relationships basics

- Relationships – tips for success

A good relationship doesn't just happen - you have to work at it...
About child, family and relationship services (video)
Services include parent education to maternal and child healthcare, child care, crisis support, child protection, family violence and relationship services.

Managing a relationship breakdown
Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognize how you’re feeling, and why. You’ll also find...

Parenting on your own
A person can become a single or sole parent for many different reasons. You may have chosen to start a family on your own, you may be separated or divorced, or your partner may have died. As a...

Relationships and communication
Good communication is about the way we talk and listen, and about our body language...

Relationships - dealing with conflict
With the physical and emotional closeness of a partnership, it is inevitable that there is sometimes conflict...

Relationship support services
You may need outside help to resolve problems and ensure your relationship stays healthy and strong...

Strong relationships, strong health
Throughout your life, the number and strength of your relationships affect your mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of social connections and good mental health are numerous. Proven links...

Developing relationships

1. 10 tips for being assertive
   Practise speaking in an assertive voice.... 10 tips for being assertive...

2. 10 tips for making new friends
   Forget about gossip and build strong relationships... 10 tips for making new friends...

3. Assertiveness
   It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity...

4. How to volunteer and boost your health (slideshow)
   Volunteering is great for our health - it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process...

5. Making friends
   Friendships are an important part of life, but many of us find it difficult to find, make or keep friends...

6. Peer pressure
   Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager’s life...

7. Relationships and communication
   Good communication is about the way we talk and listen, and about our body language...

8. Relationships – creating intimacy
   Intimacy in a relationship means being able to share a whole range of thoughts, feelings and experiences that we have as human beings...

9. Relationships – tips for success
   A good relationship doesn’t just happen - you have to work at it...

10. Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)
    Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

11. Strong relationships, strong health
    Throughout your life, the number and strength of your relationships affect your mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of social connections and good mental health are numerous. Proven links...

Family relationships
• Happy families
  It might be valuable to occasionally evaluate the dynamics of your family to ensure that everyone is as happy as they could be.

• 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry
  Teach your children to sort out minor differences themselves… 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry…

• Children and sibling rivalry
  Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age.

• Family conflict
  It is normal to disagree with each other from time to time and occasional conflict is part of family life.

• Managing a relationship breakdown
  Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognise how you’re feeling, and why. You’ll also find…

• Parenthood and your relationship
  The birth of your first child can significantly change your relationship with your partner and may impact on other relationships.

• Parenting on your own
  A person can become a single or sole parent for many different reasons. You may have chosen to start a family on your own, you may be separated or divorced, or your partner may have died. As a…

• Recent arrivals, asylum seekers and family support services
  Provides an overview of family support programs and health services available to refugees and asylum seekers living in Victoria.

Separation and divorce

• Family breakups - supporting children
  Separating parents can help children by giving them honest explanations and emotional support.

• Family breakups - tips for children
  A family breakup may be even harder for children if they have to move house as a result.

• Managing a relationship breakdown
  Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognise how you’re feeling, and why. You’ll also find…

• Stepfamilies
  Becoming part of a stepfamily involves adjusting to a number of changes.

Remarriage and repartnering

• 10 tips for happier step-parenting
  Give your undivided attention when your child asks for it… 10 tips for happier step-parenting…

• Managing a relationship breakdown
  Breaking up is a tough time. It can be better or worse depending on how you deal with it. Here is some information to help you recognise how you’re feeling, and why. You’ll also find…

• Relationships – remarriage
  A step-family will be different from your previous experience of family.

Relationship difficulties

• Anger - tips to resolve arguments
  There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out.

• Assertiveness
  It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity.

• Family conflict
  It is normal to disagree with each other from time to time and occasional conflict is part of family life.

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• Making friends
  Friendships are an important part of life, but many of us find it difficult to find, make or keep friends...

• Family violence - tips for women with disabilities
  Traditional strategies for escaping abuse are often of little use to a woman who has restricted mobility or who depends on her abuser for care...

• Peer pressure
  Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life...

• Negative emotions
  Negative emotions can dampen our enthusiasm for life, depending on how long we let them affect us...

• Body image - women
  The urge to diet or use other dangerous weight loss methods is almost always prompted by feeling unhappy with body shape or size...

• Body image - men
  Homosexual men and athletes are particularly vulnerable to poor body image or feeling insecure about their bodies...

• Talking through problems
  Kids and teenagers may be worried that adults won't take their feelings seriously...

• Family violence and children
  Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems...

• Family violence and women with disabilities
  Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse and are more likely to experience violence...

• Body image – tips for parents
  Give your child opportunities to appreciate their body for what it can do, rather than what it looks like...

• Strong relationships, strong health
  Throughout your life, the number and strength of your relationships affect your mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of social connections and good mental health are numerous. Proven links...

• Workplace conflict
  A clash of personalities at work is bad for business, because it can affect productivity and increase absenteeism...

• Work-related stress
  Work-related stress causes an increase in sick days and absenteeism, a higher turnover of staff and a drop in productivity...

• Is my body normal? (Boys)
  Boys’ bodies come in all shapes and sizes. As you get older, and go through puberty, you become more aware of your body and how it compares with others. 
  Boys’ bodies come in all shapes and sizes...

• Is my body normal? (Girls)
  Puberty is a time when your body goes through lots of changes. It’s wonderful and exciting, and can sometimes feel overwhelming. This is the time your body changes from being a girl into being a woman...

• Body image and diets
  Some people diet because they have a poor body image, not because they want to be a healthy weight...

• Family breakups - supporting children
  Separating parents can help children by giving them honest explanations and emotional support...

Violence and abuse

• Family violence explained
  Perpetrators often make excuses for their violence, for example, blaming alcohol or stress...

• 10 tips for being assertive
  Practise speaking in an assertive voice... 10 tips for being assertive...

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- 10 tips for happier step-parenting
  Give your undivided attention when your child asks for it... 10 tips for happier step-parenting...
- 10 tips for making new friends
  Forget about gossip and build strong relationships... 10 tips for making new friends...
- 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry
  Teach your children to sort out minor differences themselves... 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry...

1800RESPECT
1800RESPECT is a national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service...

About child, family and relationship services (video)
Services include parent education to maternal and child healthcare, child care, crisis support, child protection, family violence and relationship services...

Anger - tips to resolve arguments
There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out...

Assertiveness
It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity...

Breastfeeding and work
You can successfully combine breastfeeding with work if you have support from your employer, colleagues and family...

Children and sibling rivalry
Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age...

Christmas can be stressful
The expense of gifts and food, the pressure of shopping, and the expectations of the season can make Christmas an extremely stressful time...

Family breakups - supporting children
Separating parents can help children by giving them honest explanations and emotional support...

Family break ups - tips for children
A family breakup may be even harder for children if they have to move house as a result...

Family conflict
It is normal to disagree with each other from time to time and occasional conflict is part of family life...

Family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience both far higher rates and more severe forms of family violence compared to other women...

Family violence and children
Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems...

Family violence and culturally diverse women
All forms of family violence (also called domestic violence) are illegal and unacceptable in Australia. But for women from culturally diverse backgrounds, the situation is complex...

Family violence and the LGBTQI+ communities
Within Australia, intimate partner violence is the most common form of family violence. Evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Family Violence suggests intimate partner violence is as...

Family violence and women with disabilities
Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse and are more likely to experience violence...

Work and relationships

Breastfeeding and work
You can successfully combine breastfeeding with work if you have support from your employer, colleagues and family...

Workplace conflict

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A clash of personalities at work is bad for business, because it can affect productivity and increase absenteeism.

- Work-related stress
  Work-related stress causes an increase in sick days and absenteeism, a higher turnover of staff and a drop in productivity.

Getting help

- Family violence services for women
  Family violence can have an enormous impact on the health of women and their children.

- Parenting support to help prevent abuse
  There is a range of non-government agencies available to help families under stress in caring for their children.

- Relationships Australia
  Relationships Australia is a nationwide community-based organisation that provides relationship support services for individuals, families and communities.

- What is family violence?
  Family violence can be physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, economic, spiritual or legal abuse. All family violence is illegal and unacceptable.

- Getting help for someone with a mental illness
  The sooner a person with a mental illness receives treatment, the better the outcome is likely to be.

- Personal and relationship services
  There are personal and relationship services available to you that offer counselling and relationship advice.

- About child, family and relationship services (video)
  Services include parent education to maternal and child healthcare, child care, crisis support, child protection, family violence and relationship services.

- Relationships, family and mental health
  When you, your partner or someone in your family has a mental illness, it can cause stress and worry for everyone.

- St Kilda Crisis Contact Centre
  The St Kilda Crisis Contact Centre offers support, information and referrals to people who are in difficult situations.

- Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault Forum
  The 15 Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs) that are spread throughout Victoria support women, men and young people who have been sexually assaulted.

- Social worker
  Social workers are trained to help people experiencing a range of issues including family problems, anxiety, depression, crisis and trauma.

- Victoria Legal Aid
  Victoria Legal Aid provides free advice to people with legal problems, focusing on criminal law, family law and some civil law matters.

- Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service
  The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing or recovering from family violence or sexual assault.

- safe steps Family Violence Response Centre
  safe steps is a service for women and children experiencing family violence.

- Victims of crime
  Victims of crime in Victoria are entitled to free help and may also obtain victims of crime compensation and receive victim support services.

- Anger - tips to resolve arguments
  There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out.

- Relationship support services
  You may need outside help to resolve problems and ensure your relationship stays healthy and strong.

- Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
  DVRCV provides support, information and referrals to people experiencing family violence.

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• Men’s Referral Service
  The Men’s Referral Service is a free, confidential telephone helpline that offers counselling, advice and support to men who have anger, relationship or parenting issues...

• Sexual Assault Crisis Line
  SACL is a telephone crisis counselling service for people who have experienced sexual assault...

Related Information

• A Healthy Start to School
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school...

• A Healthy Start to School
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school...

• No Jab No Play
  No Jab No Play – from 1 January 2016, all parents/guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service in Victoria must provide evidence that the child is fully immunised for their age...

• Anger - tips to resolve arguments
  There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out...

• Peer pressure
  Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life...

Home

Related information on other websites

• Australian Government – Family Relationships Online.
• Child Support Agency.
• Raising Children Network.

Content Partner

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