

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents: Dealing with Conflict

All families have conflicts. Disagreements and anger are part of life. We need to find good ways to handle disagreements and express anger. We need to be able to get over arguments and continue relationships.

Dealing with conflict

All families fight. We all get angry at times.

Arguments are part of life.

Families need to find ways to:

- Talk about their problems openly.
- Manage anger so it doesn't hurt your relationships.
- Disagree but not get violent.
- Get over arguments and move on.
- Keep loving each other, even when you disagree.

Families with teenagers often have disagreements. There may be many arguments about how much independence and freedom your young person can have. This can make family life stressful.

Fights can be fixed if everyone keeps calm and shows respect:

- Talk about the main problem; don't bring up other problems too.
- Try to listen to everyone's point of view.
- Even if you disagree with everyone, show them all respect.
- If someone is very upset, you might have to wait for another time to sort things out.
- Keep your sense of humour.

When there is a problem, try not to:

- Yell.
- Swear or get nasty.
- Get violent.
- Refuse to talk.

This will only make family members frightened or more frustrated. They may start to behave the same way you do when they are angry. Talk things through calmly.

Remember you don't always have to agree on everything.

Often it is hard to find a way to talk with your teenager, particularly if they have many problems:

- Do they treat you like you are an idiot when you try to talk to them?
- Do they shut themselves in their room with a computer?
- Are they always going out?
- Do they take drugs or drink alcohol?
- Are they depressed and unable to speak openly?
- Do they yell at you and boss you around?

If you are very worried about your child and they won't listen to you when you talk to them:

- try writing a letter to them and explain how concerned you are.
- get another adult or elder that you both trust and respect to talk to them.
- speak to a counsellor or a social worker and ask for help.

Hitting children

Don't try to sort out your problems with your young person by getting violent.

In Australia it is against the law for parents or caregivers to injure a child by hitting, punching, beating, kicking, shaking or biting them.

If you physically injure your child, they may be taken away from your family home.

The best way to teach your young person respect is to show them that you can sort out disagreements or problems without getting violent yourself.

If they see you dealing with problems by talking things through calmly, then they will learn to do the same.

It is good for young people to watch their parents sort things out calmly. They learn that people can disagree and still love each other.

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Anger

Anger is a normal human feeling. Teenagers sometimes get angry as they are dealing with a lot of changes:

- Their bodies are changing.
- Their feelings and needs are changing.
- Their families' expectations of them are changing.

Feelings of anger can take over and make a young person lose control. They may break things or yell or say things that are hurtful, that they don't really mean.

They might blame you for making them feel angry. But each person is their own boss.

If your child is angry:

- Listen to them with patience.
- Try to understand their feelings.
- Respond calmly.
- Have rules and keep them.
- Make it clear that violence is never ok.
- Encourage them to think and talk about the feelings underneath the anger. What is really troubling them?
- Consider whether drug or alcohol use is contributing to the anger.

Look after yourself.

Find ways to relax:

- Do some exercise.
- Talk to a friend.
- Pray or meditate.
- Make something with your hands.
- Take time out each day to do something good for yourself.

If anger makes you frightened

Anger makes some people very upset or uncomfortable. It can be very frightening. If your child is getting angry often then you need to talk about what can be done to change this. Perhaps they can write down how they are feeling, take time out or do some exercise when they feel they are getting upset.

Or your child might need to talk to a counsellor who can help them learn to manage their feelings better and to sort out the problems causing the anger.

The school welfare officer or your local community health centre can help with a referral to an anger management or youth counsellor.

Time apart

Sometimes a young person who has many problems can be angry all the time. If they are using drugs or alcohol frequently and/or have mental health problems, this may be making things worse.

If they won't get help and can't control their behaviour and you or other family members are constantly upset, you might need some time apart.

Time away from each other might help your young person to see what they have been doing. They might then consider getting help.

Time apart might also give you a chance to think of other ways to deal with their anger.

- Can your young person stay with a good friend or family member who can deal with their behaviour?
- Can you take a holiday whilst someone else cares for them?
- Can you get a few hours to yourself each day?

If you decide that the only answer at this point of time, is to have some time apart, talk about this when you are calm.

- Do not suggest this idea when you are fighting.
- Tell the young person why you are suggesting this idea.
- Give the young person some say and some options.
- Tell them that you love them and want to work things out.
- Make another time to talk things through.
- Tell them that you believe things can get better with time out and help.

If you get angry with your young person

It is normal for parents to feel angry with their children at times.

- Let your young person know what you are feeling, and why.
- Try to calm down quickly.

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- If you are upset, take time out. Go for a walk.
- Talk about the problem with a friend. It might help to hear another person's point of view.

But if **your** anger gets out of control often, you must find some help.

Ask your doctor or your local community health centre where to go for help. If the problem is more urgent contact a support service such as **Parentline** particularly if you feel that you might abuse your child.

Many people find it hard to keep control of angry feelings. It is possible to learn to control those feelings through counselling or training.

You and your family will feel better if you learn these new skills.

What is really making you angry?

Sometimes people get angry about a small thing when a big thing is too hard to talk about. Or they get angry when they are scared or afraid of something.

Try to look for the feelings or worries behind your anger.

- Are you worried about your family's future?
- Are you worried your children are losing their traditional culture?
- Are you scared they might be using drugs?
- Are you worried about their friends and concerned they are a bad influence?

Perhaps these deeper concerns are making you angry about small things. It is best to talk about your real worries at a time when you are calm and with someone who you trust and respect or with a counsellor who is trained to help with these problems.

→ Related Fact Sheets

- Improving Communication
- Settling into a new country
- What are complex problems?
- Dealing with Violence
- Breaking the Law

→ Tips from this Fact Sheet

- All families have arguments sometimes. It is important to try and sort them out in a calm way.
- Young people often get angry when they feel they are not given enough freedom and independence.
- If your young person is angry with you, hear them out and then explain how it makes you feel.
- Young people will learn from you how to sort out their problems. So don't shout, call them names or use violence.

→ Useful resources

Parentline

VIC	Tel 13 2289
QLD, NT	Tel 1300 301 300
ACT	Tel (02) 6287 3833
SA	Tel 1300 364 100
NSW	Tel 1300 1300 52
WA	Tel 1800 654 432
TAS	Tel 1300 808 178

Strong Bonds

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