

[Coping With Family Conflict](#)



No matter how closely knit a family is, conflict is inevitable. Conflict is natural and shouldn't be ignored. Coping with recurring conflict requires open dialogue and a keen understanding of your family's issues, combined with a willingness to work toward harmonious resolutions. Communicating in a positive way can help reduce conflict so that a family can reach a peaceful resolution. This usually means that everyone agrees to a compromise or agrees to disagree. Sometimes strong emotions or power imbalances in relationships are difficult to resolve and can only be addressed in an individual and/or family counseling situation. The right coping strategies will not only help you get through the current argument, but also prevent future conflicts.

[Common Causes of Family Conflict](#)

It is well recognized that some of the *stages* that a family goes through and specific *family situations* can cause conflict:

[Stages](#)



- Learning to live as a new couple
- Birth of first child and subsequent children
- A child beginning school
- A child becoming an adolescent
- A child transitioning into adulthood

Family Situations



- Commuting long distances to and from work
- Separation and/or divorce
- Moving to a new residence/country
- Change in employment/career
- Change in financial circumstances
- Change in health status (i.e., diagnosis/treatment of a serious medical condition, aging parents)

Resolving Family Conflict

There are several ways to resolve conflict. Usually our first impulse is to react in anger and 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 to listen, negotiate, and work as a team.

Step 1: Decide if the conflict is worth addressing. To minimize the negative impact of arguments and conflict, you must only address major or recurring issues. Separate the problem from the person. If the conflict is over a minor difference, the best coping strategy may be to just leave it alone and let everybody cool off for a few hours.

Step 2: Stay calm. Whether addressing a major issue or letting a minor conflict pass, it is essential that you remain in control of your emotions. Even for a major conflict, the discussion can wait a few hours as everybody calms down. Take some deep breaths or go for a long walk to deal with onsets of anger during a family arguments. If you expect the rest of the family to remain calm, you must also keep your anger in check.

Step 3: Set reasonable boundaries for discussing conflict. Reaching a mutually agreeable resolution will help both parties cope with the conflict and move past it. This can only occur if arguments focus on the issues rather than on name-calling or other personal attacks. Resist the urge to bring up other unresolved/unrelated issues. It's also important that each family member gets a turn to speak. Be respectful and don't interrupt the other person when they are speaking.

Step 4: Listen to the family's concerns and be willing to compromise. Actively listen to what is being said and meant. Check your understanding by asking questions. Be clear and honest in

communicating your views. Ongoing conflict requires compromise for each party to cope with the issue. Compromise is not possible if you do not actively listen to individual concerns.

Step 5: Remain optimistic concerning the issue. Positivism will help rebuild family relationships and prevent future conflict; just make sure you're realistic in your expectations. Realistic optimism and open dialogue will help you cope with ongoing family crisis.

Step 6: Seek outside help from a family counselor. Family therapy will help your family resolve existing conflicts. Therapy will provide better results than simply bringing in a friend, family member or other third party to mediate. However, in some instances other third-party mediation can work, but only if you recognize and address any possible family alliances or biases beforehand.

Remember: Try to listen, negotiate, and work as a team

- Peaceful resolution depends on negotiation and respect for the other person's point of view
- Seek professional assistance if you think you and/or your family need additional help and/or support
- **Family Counselling Services in or near Toronto:**
 - Coping with Change: Families in Transition 416-585-9151
 - Family Service Association of Metro Toronto 416-595-9618
 - Catholic Family Services of Toronto 416-921-1163
 - Jewish Family & Child Service of Metro Toronto 416-638-7800



Sources: adapted from www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au and <http://www.livestrong.com/article/218474-how-to-cope-with-family-conflict/>

For additional information or to book an appointment, please contact:

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