

## Case study for resolving conflicts with TEENAGERS.

### **Objectives:**

1. Establishing your communication skills to be able to resolve conflicts carefully and peacefully.
2. Understanding and building upon one's own self-awareness and self-care patterns.
3. Understanding that how we deal with conflict impacts ourselves, our adolescents, our family, and our peers.
4. Looking at the big-picture benefits of effective conflict resolution, from your children's perspective and from your end.

**Y**ou are not from Mars. Your teenage children are not from Venus.

For the past decade, parents around the world have been criticized for helicopter parenting. Humans are notable for the long time we spend in dependent childhood and adolescence compared with other species, but we may not be such outliers after all. Many wild animal parents do not cut off support the minute their offspring leaves. In fact, many dial up the help and the training. If a youngster is having trouble getting enough to eat, animal parents will often feed them. If a youngster is not meeting peers, parents may provide introductions. Some bequeath territory and offer access to food larders they have been stocking away.

In this context of extended parental care in animals, it is interesting to think about the criticism levelled at today's parents who remain involved in their kids' lives through teenage years and after. A report from the Harvard Graduate School of Education noted that "especially in affluent communities, their parents are hyper-involved in their academic and social lives, so it's unusual for teenagers to study, arrange a meeting about a bad grade, or even resolve a disagreement with a friend without parental help." Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you as a parent equip your son/daughter with the fishing rod and not just present the cooked fish on the table. This metaphor of the fishing rod can be used to refer to

the tools required for the respective teenager to deal with the world and have enough conflict resolution skills to endeavour. The excesses of some parents are easy to mock and robbing young adults of opportunities to practice resolving conflicts is clearly misguided, yet amid the criticisms, the clear importance of continued parental involvement gets muddied. Mintz puts it like this: Parents “have good reason to be standing by with a rescue rope as their children try to make their way through the overgrown and traditional paths to adulthood that may no longer secure employment.

As a parent it is fruitful to try to think back to your feelings and experiences as a young person. This can help you relate to your child. It is useful to remember that teenage brain development means your child might not be able to see the risks and consequences of a situation. Your child might not be able to see things from your perspective either. It is pivotal for you to try to be flexible about the little issues. This might mean your child is more willing to listen and discuss bigger issues while sharing any family burdens. Do not forget about yourself! Remember to go easy on yourself and do not expect to be perfect, you are human too. If you overreact or slightly lose your self-control, just say sorry and start again when you can. It is important to try to avoid dealing with conflict when you and your child are feeling upset or angry. Preferably you would wait until you feel calm. It will be very helpful if you manage to prepare what you are going to say and think about the words you want to use. Moreover, try to make sure that not every conversation with your child is about difficult issues. Spend some time enjoying each other’s company too!

### **Introductory task: ‘What teenagers need to thrive’ by Charisse Nixon**

Access this video on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S05PBOldSeE> . Nixon here speaks of the troubles that teenagers usually face. She speaks about the importance of setting the stage for our teenagers. A stage on which they struggle to identify who they are. She speaks about the basic needs of the adolescents and also what she refers to as the 4 gems that will help adolescents promote and maintain positive connections that will aid the resolving of conflicts. The main points which may be taken from this talk and which may lead to meaningful connections are the following:

### ***Gem 1: The gateway to others***

If a teenager does not have empathy it will be very difficult for him/her to get somewhere. Since we lead by example, it is very important to show your teenager how empathy looks like.

### ***Gem 2: Gratitude***

When is the last time you as a parent wrote a thank you letter? Gratitude increases connection and since adolescents tend to become isolated, it works to take away this negative mood and it causes positive moods which have been experimentally recorded. It takes away pessimism that they might be struggling with and causes optimism.

### ***Gem 3: Forgiveness***

Forgiveness gives us a sense of control. It empowers us. It reduces anger and increases perspective taking.

### ***Gem 4: Humility***

Humility leads to deep connections. Fractured relationships, humility repairs. Humility promotes acceptance.

***As Nixon puts it, these 4 gems have the potential to change our focus and ultimately change our hearts. Use your favourite medium which could be your loved journal, your laptop or even a piece of napkin on which you can share your thoughts about this talk and hopefully set short-term goals. Set a date on your calendar and get back to these set goals/ affirmations. See how far you have managed to come and realise what can be further adjusted. Be kind to yourself. You got this!***

## Talking through conflict: tips

### *Dealing with conflict aftermath: tips*

Despite your best efforts, it might take a while for you and your child to calm down after a conflict. Also, your child might feel disappointed if you have said no to something. Thus, it is fruitful to try and help your child to calm down by showing your understanding, letting him/her express his/her disappointment, or giving him/her space if he/she needs it. Again, remember to look after yourself, talking to someone you trust can help you feel better about the situation.

### *Handling violence*

There is a difference between conflict and violence. Conflict, disagreement and some anger are OK – but violence is not OK!

Teenagers are still learning about what's OK and what is not. They might still be learning where the line is between conflict and violence – for example, in fights with siblings. You can help with this. However, if your child is damaging property, yelling, or swearing excessively, hitting, or making threats to harm something or someone, you need to set clear boundaries. It is important to show him/her that he/she has crossed the line and his/her behaviour is not acceptable.

If your child is showing early signs of violent behaviour, it can help to:

- give him/her a clear message that the behaviour is not OK.
- tell him/her that you will not speak with him/her while he/she's in that state,
- let her know that you are willing to talk to him/her and work things out together when he/she has calmed down,
- let him/her know that that there will be consequences for the behaviour,
- make sure your own behaviour is respectful, and that you are managing your own emotions and modelling self-control.

If your child has experienced violence from another adult or child, he/she might need professional help to feel safe, to deal with what he/she has experienced, and to learn new ways to behave. If you find it hard to control your own anger or violence, you might also find professional help useful and for this you might wish to refer to the **'Service Directory'**.

**First things first:**

*Most importantly, as a parent you have rights and responsibilities! Thus, it is important to keep in mind that:*

- **You are to be treated with respect.**

You, along with everyone else in the family, have the right to be treated with respect. This includes not only parents and teens, but also siblings and extended family members who may be living in the home.

- **It is pivotal to set the rules and control privileges.**

You have the right to set rules and limit privileges when rules are not followed. This includes house and family rules that are followed out of respect for everyone who lives in the home. Some examples are rules about chores, guests, curfews, and illegal substances or activities within the home.

- **You are entitled to know the truth.**

Without being annoying, you as a parent have the right to ask questions and expect that they will be answered truthfully. Parents should be aware of a teenager's growing need for privacy when invoking this right. Also, remember to ask questions when emotions are not running high to avoid arguing with an angry teen. That will only add to the problem instead of solving it.

- **You can ask about the who, what, and where.**

You as a parent have the right to know where your teenager is, who they are with and generally what they are doing. While teens do not have to go into detail about private matters, like their thoughts about the person they are dating, for instance, they do have to let parents know things like the location of the party they will be attending and who is chaperoning the party.

- **To Make Mistakes.**

You are human and you have the right to make mistakes and change to change your mind. Mistakes happen, learning to fix a mistake and apologising is important. No one is perfect and the decision you made may not be the best when you look back on it. It may be time to fall back and regroup. While your teen may not appreciate your reversal right away, your willingness to apologise and correct a mistake is a good model for them.

- **To Show You Care.**

You have the right and obligation to let your teen know that you love and care about them. While giving your teen a huge hug in front of their friends when you drop them off may not be the time, letting your teen know daily you care is important enough to mention, text, email, etc. A simple message works best, being careful not to embarrass them around their peers is also fruitful.

***\*Debriefing and reflection time:***

- 1) *How do conflicts with your teenagers make you feel?*
- 2) *When faced with a conflict, the first question to ask yourself is: "what is really going on here?"*
- 3) *Did he/she really mean it like it sounded?*
- 4) *Is there some information I am missing here?*
- 5) *Am I looking at the situation from their viewpoint?*

- 6) *Have I attempted to put the shoe on the other foot?*
- 7) *Is my tone filled with accusations or compassion?*
- 8) *Am I attempting to isolate myself or press in closer to find a resolution?*
- 9) *Am I fighting for a win or fighting for peace?*
- 10) *Are my feelings and emotions rational or running wild?*
- 11) *If people I respected (outside of my family) were to hear my words, would I be embarrassed?*
- 12) *Am I expecting more from this person than they are equipped to give?*
- 13) *Have I thought of ways to compromise?*
- 14) *Am I offering them the benefit of the doubt or jumping to conclusions?*
- 15) *Is there any good in this situation that I can focus on – no matter how small?*
- 16) *Am I playing the victim or looking for common ground?*
- 17) *Will I care about, or remember this in five years?*
- 18) *Am I letting love and grace lead my words or anger and disappointment?*

### **Activity: Conflict – Bull’s-Eye?**

Time: 15 to 20 minutes (this is a short activity since it is important to seek not to bore a teenager.)

Family Group Size: Any

Materials: Flip-chart paper, markers, paper, pens

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- To understand our different perceptions of conflict.
- To consider a different perspective on conflict.
- To learn techniques to better handle conflict.
- To build trust.
- To understand that how we deal with conflict impacts ourselves, our family members and even our outside peers.

This activity helps family team members to:

- (1) become more comfortable with conflict,
- (2) consider the positive aspects of conflict, and
- (3) understand the possible benefits to themselves and the other family members.

Mode: Draw a large target (consisting of three circles, one inside the other) on the flip-chart paper. The innermost circle represents the family members themselves. The middle circle represents the team. The outer circle represents the family. Ask, “How does effectively resolving conflicts affect you, the other family members, and your family as a whole?” As family members shout out various ideas, record them in the appropriate place on the target.





**Variations:**

Create two targets: one for the benefits of effective conflict resolution and one for ineffective conflict management skills, and how each impacts the individual family member, the family, and the people affected from the outside.

**Further discussion questions post activity:**

1. Were your teenager's perspectives different from your perspective?
2. What were some things you learned by considering another's perspective?
3. Does discussing conflict like this make it "less scary"? In what ways?
4. Is conflict good or bad?
5. What are some ways in which conflict is detrimental to the family?
6. What are some ways in which conflict enriches the family?

**References/Further reading:**

- 'Humans aren't the only ones that help out their adult kids — here's why animals do it too'- <https://ideas.ted.com/humans-arent-the-only-ones-that-help-out-their-adult-kids-heres-why-animals-do-it-too/>
- 'Turning Parent-Teen Stress Into Parent-Teen Success' - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzflpW91yMg>
- 'Raising Happy Teenagers'- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35n\\_H7ObY-s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35n_H7ObY-s)
- 'The big book of conflict resolution games' - <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2070/2016/08/The-big-book-of-Conflict-Resolution-Games.pdf>