

Dear Parents and Families,

After 7 weeks of e-learning, we have spent a lot of time with our families. With increased time, there is often increased arguments within our family unit. This edited article written by Erin Leonard, Ph.D for Psychology Today might offer some guidance on how to manage family conflict during this time.

De-Escalate Family Conflict During Quarantine

The frustrations of adjusting to life under the same roof without a break creates normal conflicts. Yet, when unresolved conflict from the past bubbles up and rears its head, it can be painful. The entire family spins. Implementing five techniques may help resolve family fights.

First, remain calm and do not take sides. Taking sides hurts feelings and divides the family. Scapegoating one person in the family, so the rest of the family feels better, is dysfunctional and does not improve family dynamics in the long run.

Say neutral statements like, "Everybody is hurt and angry. Let's all take a breath," or "Everyone has a right to be heard, but let's pause until we can talk calmly." Often, an empathic directive to the person who is in the most distress may help, "You are so angry. I can see. Let's get a breath of fresh air." The parent remains neutral while helping the person who seems to be the most distraught.

Second, do not fuel the fight by engaging in the surface details of the discussion. Instead, try and understand the feelings fueling the argument. For example, if one family member is screaming at another family member for allowing the dog to get out, try saying, "I think you are scared it is your fault, so you want to blame your sister. But, no one is to blame. It was an accident." By identifying and empathizing with the feelings supplying the argument, the parent may be able to soothe the party in distress. Empathizing with a person's feelings helps to calm him or her and may deter a defensive "lashing out" at others.

Third, calmly instruct everyone to pause. Using a calm and soothing voice, assertively say to the entire family, "Please, no talking for two minutes." Encourage all family members to take a time-out. Reassure the family that the issue will be addressed, but a solution may take some time and continued effort.

Fourth, use the fight to understand anxiety that may be underneath the surface. After a blowout fight, a family member may be able to identify a feeling or issue which he or she was unable to identify until now.

For example, an adolescent boy, Mike, blows up at his mom for politely confronting his dad about something on a family walk. The mom is hurt and confused and defends herself. Yet, Mike continues to yell at her and encourages his sister to reprimand his mom as well. Mike refuses to hear his mom's side as he pedals away. The mom walks home and finds Mike in his room. She calmly approaches him, tells him she loves him, and asks, "What is going on?" He looks at her and tearfully says, "I don't want you and dad to get a divorce. Please don't get a divorce." The mom comforts her son and reassures him that there is not going to be a divorce. She suddenly realizes that Mike's two best friends have parents who are separated and filing for a divorce. Mike has an understandable and warranted worry. Although the family walk was not pleasant, she was able to assist Mike with an underlying anxiety.

Fifth, take this opportunity in the present to heal the past. Family blowouts are not fun but are sometimes out of a parent's control. Using them to help identify and heal a past emotional injury that has not been addressed may help everyone in the long term.



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For example, when a family member has been hurt, but was unable to express these feelings, the emotions that were locked inside often re-emerge in the present, triggered by an interaction that emotionally resembles a past conflict. The burst of negativity erupting from this person is often shocking and seems irrational. Yet, if the parent remains calm, listens for the feelings instead of defending his or her perspective, and empathizes with the emotions, the distraught family member may find permanent peace with the issue.

For instance, say Sally was often hurt as a child because, despite stellar academic achievements, she was rarely recognized. Yet, her father frequently commented on how bright her brother was. Sally's younger brother seemed to consistently receive the recognition she desperately wished for. Sally returns home from her senior year in college. She studies in her room for most of the day but joins the family for dinner. During the meal, her father laughs and jokes with her brother about his online gaming victories. Caught up in the video game discussion, the father forgets to ask Sally how her studying is going. After dinner, Sally leaves the table and starts the dishes. Her brother rushes off to continue gaming. Because Sally is upset, she is not focused on the task at hand and accidentally flicks on the sink disposal without checking it. The disposal noisily grinds and Sally's father yells, "Stop!" He reprimands Sally for being careless. Sally begins to cry, yelling, "I cannot do anything right! I cannot stand being home! This place is awful!" Her brother re-enters the kitchen to get a glass of water, and yells at her for acting "crazy." Sally fights back. Sally's father jumps in and defends her brother. The entire family is now embroiled in a screaming match.

Alternatively, say the father implements the techniques above. He refrains from taking the brother's side. Instead of focusing on the details of the argument, the broken sink disposal, he attempts to listen for feelings. He says, "You are so upset. Clearly, I hurt your feelings. I know you were trying to help." Sally now feels better because her father recognizes how she is feeling. Because Sally feels understood, she softens. The dad pauses and allows her to settle down before speaking again. Finally, the dad asks, "What is wrong? It seems like this is about more than the disposal?" At this point, Sally may gain insight to the possibility that she has had hurt feelings for years but was not able to discuss them. She takes the opportunity to tell her father what she has been experiencing. Her father remembers to empathize, "You have been hurt by my comments. I am sorry. I did not realize. I'm really proud of you and I appreciate your efforts and your accomplishments."

It is important to note that empathizing with a family member's feelings does not mean a parent is condoning negative behavior or surrendering a perspective. For example, "Ben, you are angry. You have every right to be, but you cannot throw your backpack. Please go pick it up." Empathy simply conveys an understanding of how a person feels which allows the person to feel less alone in the situation, and connected to the parent because the parent understands.

Family fights are never fun, but if handled correctly they may provide a parent with an opportunity to help a child cope with anxiety and hurt feelings. Resolving family conflict productively may decrease future battles and maintain the family as a safe, comforting, and secure spot for everyone.

May this week be a week of sunshine and quality family time for all of you.

Sincerely,
Your School Social Workers and School Counselors
School Social Work Program
Catholic Charities Indianapolis

WEEKLY TIP FOR PARENTS:

In "The Happiness Lab" podcast, Yale professor Dr. Laurie Santos takes you through the latest scientific research and shares inspiring stories that will forever alter the way you think about happiness. She has changed the lives of thousands through her university course, Psychology And The Good Life, which is now being offered online for free at:

https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being?ranMID=40328&ranEAID=EHFxFW6yx8Uo&ranSiteID=EHFxFW6yx8Uo-.uLuPn2MieBhuQZx71MA2Q&siteID=EHFxFW6yx8Uo-.uLuPn2MieBhuQZx71MA2Q&utm_content=10&utm_medium=partners&utm_source=linkshare&utm_campaign=EHFxFW6yx8Uo

Recently, Dr. Santos recorded a series of new episodes on Coronavirus for her podcast. Santos said, "The hope is that I'm giving my listeners evidence-based tips that they can put into practice immediately to feel better during this stressful time."

<https://www.happinesslab.fm/>

COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

Community Compass is a free, quick and easy app designed to show people where they can find food assistance in Marion County. With a smart phone, you can find free meal locations and free grocery locations near you. If you do not have a smart phone, you can text the word "hi" to 317-434-3758.

Indianapolis Public Schools webpage offers up-to-date information on local food and other community resources

<https://myips.org/blog/district/community-partners-continue-to-provide-resources-to-families-los-socios-comunitarios-continuan-brindando-recursos-a-las-familias/>

The City of Indianapolis website has a list of community resources and supports aimed at helping those that are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://www.indy.gov/topic/covid>

2-1-1 is a free and confidential service that helps Hoosiers across Indiana find the local resources they need. Dial 2-1-1 for 24-hours a day, 7 days a week support.

Catholic Charities Crisis Office 317-236-1512

St. Vincent de Paul Help Line 317-687-0169

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES:

Be Well Indiana: <https://bewellindiana.com/>

A comprehensive site created to provide Mental Health resources to Indiana families during the pandemic.

National Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis line via online chat at: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/> or by text: Send the word HOME to 741741

Community Health Network: 317-621-5700

Provides immediate assessments by phone for persons experiencing a mental health crisis 24 hours daily and offers referrals and scheduling for mental health and addiction treatment providers.

Sandra Eskenazi Mental Health Center: 317-880-8485

Provides 24-hour telephone crisis interventions for persons with mental health or addiction treatment emergencies.

Aspire Indiana Crisis Line: 1-800-560-4038

Provides 24 hour phone crisis interventions for persons experiencing a mental health or addictions crisis.

Adult and Child Mental Health Center: 1-877-882-5122

Provides a 24-hour crisis and referral phone line.

Families First: 317-251-7575

24-hour crisis and suicide intervention services by both phone and text messaging.

Indiana Coalition against Domestic Violence: 1-800-332-7385

Offers 24-hour crisis intervention, safety planning and shelter referrals for persons in domestic violence situations.

HAPPY, HEALTHY KIDS AT HOME:

"The Kids Are All... Home" A new podcast for kids stuck at home, by kids stuck at home

Kids may be finding themselves with a lot of free time on their hands. However, a new podcast from Pineapple Street Studios is offering children a creative alternative to sitting around all day.

Using a smartphone or laptop, kids can create and host "Stuck at Home" podcasts featuring news reports, interviews with family and friends, book and movie reviews, favorite stories, or anything else their imaginations can dream of.

<https://www.radio.com/media/podcast/kids-are-allhome>