



## Getting along at home

There is no substitution for the family unit when it comes to helping people learn, grow and experience warmth and love.

Family relationships can be among the most rewarding, most meaningful relationships of all. They can also be the most challenging. Members of families often have different desires, needs, personalities and goals. These differences can cause conflict.

### **To manage conflict, listen**

Whatever the problems, all families can learn to manage conflict better. Managing conflict helps families work together, adapt to change, relieve stress and be happier. To accomplish this, family members should first know themselves. They should know their own priorities and strengths. They should be aware of their feelings.

Families must also learn to communicate effectively to help deal with conflict. Good communication has long focused on effective speaking. But effective listening is just as crucial. Good listening must be learned – it takes practice to do it well – and is essential at home.

### **Teens, too, need and want parents' attention**

Parents and children should listen to each other intently, trying to understand each other's point of view. Teenagers particularly have confused feelings. And though they may not seem to, they need and want parental attention. Teens will better understand their parents if they feel they are being heard and their feelings are respected. They will see as they mature that their parents' behavior was motivated by feelings of love for them.

All family members' feelings must be expressed clearly and interpreted accurately. Don't expect people to read your mind. Be honest and direct. Never assume you know how the speaker feels. If you're not sure, ask.

### **Try these tips to get along at home**

- **Have family meetings.** Set aside a time each month to discuss problems and issues.
- **Give your undivided attention.** When a family member wants to talk, don't read, watch TV, fall asleep or make yourself busy with something else.
- **Listen calmly.** Even though there may be a difference of opinion, concentrate on hearing and understanding the speaker's point of view. Don't start preaching when a give-and-take discussion is wanted.
- **Speak in a pleasant tone of voice.** Gruffness and abruptness cause hostility.
- **Avoid making judgments.** Anyone avoids confiding in someone who is critical of his or her behavior.

- **Pay attention to voice inflection and body language.** Less than 10 percent of communication is accomplished through words.
- **Be specific.** When airing a complaint, state the specific situation that bothers you. Don't generalize.
- **Stick to one issue at a time.** Don't bring up all the past grievances against the other person – it's unfair and will cause more anger and resentment.
- **Keep the door open on any subject.** Too often children avoid discussing things that may make their parents feel uncomfortable. Youngsters often pay a very high price for not having the right information about many subjects.
- **Listen actively.** Use your own words to paraphrase the speaker's comment. He or she can then verify or clarify the message and intent. Inject your response only after the speaker verifies the feedback.
- **Maintain eye contact.** Look at the person you're talking with. Good eye contact helps build mutual understanding.
- **Be aware of how you treat other children in the family.** Favoritism could make a child feel rejected, unloved, and jealous. Be fair and consistent.
- **Show appreciation for others.** If someone has said or done something to make you feel good, tell them. Don't pass up an opportunity to give a compliment.
- **Encourage positive self-worth.** Help your youngster build confidence by encouraging (but not forcing) participation in sports, music, art, and dance or any other hobby or interest.
- **Learn how to handle stress.** Take time out for yourself. Eat right and exercise.

### **If you need help ...**

Your family can be a special source of love and strength. For families who want to improve relationships, it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help. If you need more advice, call Crisis Services at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. © [www.genhs.org](http://www.genhs.org)

