

# Struggling With Family Conflict?

MANAGING CHALLENGING FAMILY DYNAMICS DURING COVID-19

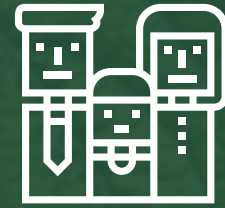
Weekly Wellness & Counseling Newsletter | April 20th, 2020



**Conflict** happens in **all** families. It's normal, especially right now.



**You are allowed to feel how you feel.** Your feelings are **important** and deserve to be heard.



**Everyone** in your household deserves to be heard, too.

IF YOUR FAMILY IS STRUGGLING RIGHT NOW, A **FAMILY MEETING** MIGHT HELP.

## WHEN CONFLICT BECOMES DANGER



It is not OK to feel emotionally or physically unsafe in your family

**Verbal abuse** can be harder to recognize than physical abuse. Verbal abuse is:

- When someone uses **negative/demeaning words** to **maintain control** over someone else
- An **unequal pattern of behavior** where the abuser uses language to harm another person's **self-esteem, confidence, or sense of reality**
- [What's the difference between abuse and a normal argument?](#)

### What Do I Do If I'm Afraid for My Safety?

Call or chat the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) by clicking the logo below



# How to Have a Family Meeting

**1 Inviting:** Propose the meeting in advance. You can even send out this email!  
*"It's a stressful time right now and I know we're all feeling it. Maybe it would help if we set up a time to talk about how we're doing. Let's make it a neutral time, so no one is feeling really upset right off the bat. How's tomorrow around 2:00pm for everyone?"*

**2 Reflecting:** Everyone fills out the form on page 3 before the meeting.

**3 Setting the Scene:** Start the meeting by reading some ground rules.

1. It's **normal** to get on each other's nerves. It's okay that we have conflict.
2. We've all got to live together right now, so it's in **ALL** of our best interests to get to a better place.
3. We'll probably disagree. **That's okay.** The point isn't to agree, it's to try to **understand** each other better
4. **Listening** means being able to repeat back what the person said in way *they're* happy with. It doesn't mean waiting for someone to stop talking so we can tell them why they're wrong/right.
5. We all have the right to have different opinions and feelings. **No one gets to say that another person's opinion or feelings are wrong**
6. **Each of us** will probably have to change at least one thing about what we're doing to make things better.

**4 Sharing and Listening:**

- Each person reads what they wrote
- After they're done, the "listeners" have 3-5 minutes to repeat back what they heard. **They are JUST trying to repeat it back, NOT to challenge the person or express their own feelings.**
- Check out the example on page 4 before you start.

**5 Summarizing:** Go back around the circle and have each person answer these two questions.

1. What's one thing you want everyone else to remember about what you said?
2. What's one thing you heard from another person that is important for you to remember?

**6 Ending:** It can be tempting to keep talking after this, but it's often more helpful to let everyone decompress in their own way. It can be a great tension reliever to end the meeting with something **silly** (Tiger King charades, anyone?)

**7 Repeating:** Try keeping the meeting on the books for next **week**. Doing this helps *prevent* conflict before it starts!

# REFLECTION: WHAT AM I THINKING AND FEELING THIS WEEK?

**1** What is most frustrating to me right now? What do I think and feel about this situation?

Example: *I need time alone. People can't just come in my room whenever they want. It makes me feel angry and childlike, like I'm not respected here.*

**2** What do I want to happen instead?

Example: *Others understand that when my door is closed I'm spending time by myself. People acknowledge that it's okay for me to be introverted.*

**3** Is there anything I'm doing that might be contributing to the problem? Is there anything I'm willing to do instead?

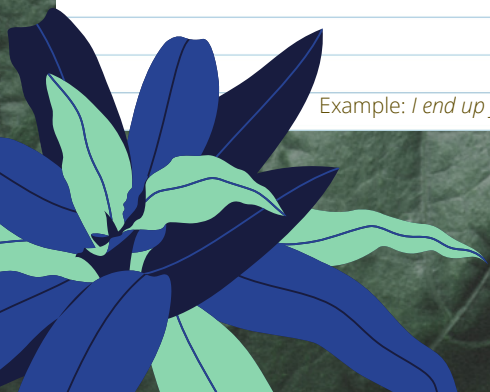
Example: *That I haven't really told anyone how I feel about this. Maybe I could be more vocal or specific about when I want to be by myself and when I want to hang out with the rest of the family.*

**4** Why might the changes in (2) and (3) be hard to implement?

Example: *Mom has a history of not respecting my feelings about this. I sometimes forget to communicate it without yelling.*

**5** This meeting will have been worth doing if...

Example: *I end up feeling more understood and like my alone time will be respected.*



# How to Listen and Mirror Back

1 Be willing to be **changed** by what you're hearing.

2 **Repeat back** what you've heard, **without adding your feelings and opinions.** Remember, your turn to speak will come.

3 After you've mirrored back, ask "**Was that right?**"

4 Remember, the point isn't to "fix" the problem, it is to **understand** what is being said.



In this example Jesse is the speaker and is having a meeting with his Mom and Dad. Only question (1) from the reflection sheet is included.

## What NOT TO Do

**Jesse:** The most frustrating thing to me right now is when you make me feel like talking to my friends is doing something wrong because I'm not doing school. I feel like you don't understand how hard it is to suddenly be stuck here away from everything I was doing. I feel like you aren't even interested in how I am.

**Mom:** I understand how you could feel that but you have to understand how important school is right now! You want to finish your degree on time don't you?

**Jesse:** Yes...but...

**Dad:** Jesse, WHY would you think we don't care about you? Of course we care about you! We're doing all your laundry for God's sake! If anything I feel like you don't care about US!

**Mom:** And it's BECAUSE we care about you that we want you to be successful at school right now! We're worried about you!

**Jesse:** Okay but you're not understanding...I feel...

## What TO Do

**Jesse:** The most frustrating thing to me right now is when you make me feel like talking to my friends is doing something wrong because I'm not doing school. I feel like you don't understand how hard it is to suddenly be stuck here away from everything I was doing. I feel like you aren't even interested in how I am.

**Mom:** It seems like you're saying that we get mad at you for being online instead of doing school work, is that right?

**Jesse:** Yeah, but it feels like you missed a bit...?

**Dad:** I think I can fill it in. You don't like when we get on your back about friends AND I you feel like we don't get how difficult it is to suddenly be here instead of at school. That makes you feel like we don't want to know how you are or what you're feeling. Yeah?

**Jesse:** Yeah, that's pretty much it! It makes me feel like you guys aren't really taking my needs seriously.

**Mom:** Got it - You don't like it when we make you feel like you shouldn't be spending time with friends BECAUSE that makes you feel like we're not acknowledging how difficult this has been for you. It makes you feel like we don't care. That's been hard for you, yeah?

**Jesse:** Yeah, it has. Okay, I think you got it. Next question.

# Care for Parents

Many of us are coping with a **new** and **unexpected** set of family dynamics, **parents** included.

Parents may be seeking ways to **support** their student's adjustment to distance learning **while** adjusting to this "new normal" themselves.



If you found this video helpful, check out:

[Care for the Parent | Dealing With Disruption and Loss](#)

[Care for the Parent | Managing Family Stress](#)