

MOVING ON TO HIGH SCHOOL

EFFECTS OF FAMILY CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

FACTSHEET FOR PARENTS

INTRODUCTION

Our personalities, personal sensitivities, the baggage we carry from childhood and past experiences can make us vulnerable and insecure in relationships, less able to give or receive love or to deal with conflict.

What is happening in our lives in the present also affects the way we interact with each other and react to conflict. If, for example, we are struggling with financial difficulty or poverty, stresses at work or problems with children, we will almost certainly experience more conflict at home and be less able to manage our disagreements.

RELATIONSHIPS

Just as we are all different there are different ways of making relationships work. Some people are comfortable with a stormy relationship; some seem able to talk things through calmly; others settle for a quiet life and agree to differ, but conflict plays a part in all relationships.

Many differences and disagreements – in fact, the majority – are not resolvable, and accepting them or compromise may be the only way forward.

A couple's aim should be to keep a sense of connection, to offer support and affection to each other, manage power sharing and have enough good times together to outweigh the negative impact of conflict.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

Friction between parents or carers can be a symptom of a struggling relationship and can have an extreme effect on the children.

Children are particularly at risk when:

- Conflict is frequent and intense
- Disputes are full of physical and verbal aggression
- Parents treat one another with quiet contempt or the 'silent treatment'
- One parent withdraws during an argument or walks out
- Disagreements are about the child

RISILIENCE OF CHILDREN

Most children are resilient and understand that their parents love them, even when parents are not getting on too well together.

- When loved and given affection most children cope and thrive
- Everyone has conflict in their relationships, disagreements are inevitable
- Other family members can give support and increase children's understanding
- How conflict is resolved is the key

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Research provides some pointers to handling conflict at home. Not all the suggestions will be relevant to you: after all, you know your family best.

- Don't try and hide conflict behind closed doors. Children are sensitive to an atmosphere and know when things are not right
- Avoid arguing in front of the children – they'll think they are to blame
- If you argue in front of the children, let them see you making up, and, if possible, resolving the problem. The humour, apologies and understanding that can follow an argument provide a fantastic model for children to use in their own lives
- If children don't see things resolved, let them know that you have made up with your partner and everything is okay
- Don't try and get children to take sides and don't lavish lots of attention on them because things with your partner aren't going well. Instead, take time to listen to what they are thinking about and help them explain how they are feeling
- If possible, maintain a united stance on discipline with your partner
- If you or your partner is going through a bad patch, be sensitive to any changes in your child's behaviour. Have they become more withdrawn, started acting up, or are finding it hard to settle at school?

For more information and advice:

If conflict feels like a serious problem, consider seeking some outside help, especially if you think your children are being affected. You may find the following organisations useful:

ParentlinePlus – 0808 800 2222 (helpline)

Add logo here



Relate – 0845 130 4010 (emergency helpline)

Marriage Care – 0207 371 1341

National Family Mediation – 0117 904 2825 (helpline)

Families Need Fathers – 0870 7607 496 (helpline)

Fathers Direct – 00845 634 1328

Pinkparents UK – 08701 273 274 (helpline)

FLLAG (families and friends of lesbians and gays) – 0145 486 2418 (helpline)

National Domestic Violence Helpline – 0808 2000 247 (helpline)

NSPCC – 0808 800 5000

Home-Start – 0800 068 6368 (information line)

Please add local information and contact details here