

ALLEVIATING CONFLICT IN THE HOME

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I always think of home as being a refuge, a place to escape from stress at work and a place to be myself. It's a safe haven where I can share my beliefs and personal convictions, a place where I am appreciated and encouraged for who I am. It's a retreat where I am able to invite friends over to share conversation and a meal, play games, or watch a movie. I like the idea of it being a place where I can just unwind and chill out. So, if there is conflict in my place of refuge, then I am in trouble.

As parents, we need to keep a close watch over the atmospheric conditions in our homes. When we see conflict brewing, we need to identify the source quickly and deal with it. It might be initiated by disharmony between parents, or between kids. It might be due to inconsistencies in parenting where one parent is strict and the other indulgent. It could be teens flexing their independent muscles or one person getting more attention in the home than another. For example, a family member may be disabled, or have special needs. It might be that one child is showing a particular ability and needs to attend special practices to attain the success they seek. The cause of the conflict might even be the result of unrealistic expectations placed on children by parents, or parents on each other. The sources of conflict are numerous and I am sure you have all experienced some of these scenarios at some time in your home life.

My greatest home stress was when my father remarried and moved into my stepmother's family home. Her mother had spoiled her so much that my stepmother didn't have any clue about managing the home and, since my step-grandmother still lived there, she did most of the work. It was a very difficult situation since my Dad did not own the home and was loathe to set boundaries. The result was continual interference by my step-grandmother who did not hesitate to make snide remarks about my Dad or me whenever she felt like it. Many stressful times were experienced in those early days.

How do we lessen the likelihood of conflict in our homes? We need to spend one-on-one time regularly with each child enabling them to talk about their worries. We need to hold family meetings to not only plan the good stuff, but also to address potential issues. We need to anticipate conflict situations and proactively ward them off. In the case of newly blended families, parents need to be particularly vigilant in protecting their own children's identity in the new situation and help them through the transition.

When there is obvious conflict in the home, parents must take the lead to deal with it quickly. Observe carefully what is happening. If the conflict is only between two family members, firstly take them aside one by one to discuss the issue, then together to work it out. If conflict is being created by warring parents,

then that needs to be addressed away from the rest of the family. Professional counseling may well need to be sought to deal with deep-seated conflicts. If one teen is challenging her parents then the family expectations and boundaries need to be restated. If the teen is over 18 and can't live with those rules then he/she will need to find his/her own way. That's tough, but tough love shows you love. Above all, respect for one another is key to alleviating conflict. Teach it well.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.