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Family Disruptions — Arguments and Conflicts

Disputes between you and your children are inevitable in family life. If your family never has arguments, it probably means that issues are being avoided. To become productive adults, children need to be able to voice their opinions - even if they disagree with yours - and feel they are being taken seriously.

Even so, you can and should keep the negative impact of arguments to a minimum.

Be selective about the issues you fight over. When a potential problem arises, decide if it is really worth the battle; some issues probably are not. For example, if your child wants to wear an old pair of sneakers to school rather than the newer pair you recently bought her, or if she wants to wear her hair a little longer than you would prefer, you might decide to let her have her way, choosing to take a stand on more important matters instead. Pick your battles carefully.

Let your child win sometimes. When you and your youngster argue, you need to do more than listen to her point of view; when she presents a persuasive case, be willing to say, "You convinced me. We'll do it your way." Let your youngster know that you value her point of view, and that through communication, conflicts can be resolved - and that sometimes she can win.

Boundaries for Arguments

As long as arguments stay within certain boundaries, they are an acceptable and productive form of communication. They can continue as long as they are under control, respectful and are moving toward a solution. But discontinue them if they degenerate into name-calling, if calm voices are replaced by shouting or if you and your child are going around in circles without progressing toward a resolution. Never laugh at your child, no matter how ludicrous her arguments sound to you; by laughing you are essentially ridiculing her and what she is saying.

If you are unhappy with the essay your child wrote about the Civil War for school, for example, the two of you can discuss what you perceive to be its shortcomings. But remember, it is her school assignment and her responsibility. Her teacher is the ultimate judge. If the dialogue between you and your child starts to get personal ("You don't know what you're talking about!"), then it's time for a break. Tell your child: "This discussion isn't going anywhere. We need to stop, cool down and come back to it later." Resume the dialogue later in the day, when one or both of you might have a new approach to the problem.

Some families actually schedule these follow-up discussions. A parent might say, "Come back with five points to support your argument, and I'll have five to support mine." Families can even create a format for these dialogues: The child speaks uninterrupted for five minutes, and then the parent responds during the next five minutes; after another round of five minutes each, you might find areas where you can agree or compromise.

Recurrent Conflicts

If conflicts about particular issues recur again and again, take a look at the root causes. Think deeply about why you and your child are arguing about these matters, and try taking some

preventive action. For example, if your youngster rebels against going to bed each night, she may be using her outbursts as a way to stay up a little longer, or to get more attention. Or if she repeatedly argues about doing her homework, try to put an end to these conflicts by actually writing up a contract stipulating the expectations, responsibilities, rewards and punishments for doing and not doing homework. Remember that the homework assignment is made by the teacher and is your child's responsibility. She may not do it your way, but if she is satisfying the school's requirements, you should not turn it into an issue at home. Both you and your child should sign the contract, agree to abide by it, and (hopefully) end the disagreements about the subject.

Do not forget that children learn how to handle disagreements by watching their parents' example. How readily do you and your partner have "good" arguments, which end in successful reconciliation? How readily do you stay angry, or avoid fights altogether? Your children model themselves on you.

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**AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
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Tool Kit for Teen Care: Internet Safety and Adolescents

How many adolescents are using the Internet?

- More than one in three teenagers say they have a computer with Internet access in the home.
- Half of all middle and high-school students have used the Internet at least once.
- About 26 percent of adolescents say they have used the Internet for an hour or more in the past week.
- Adolescents say they use the Internet for personal use (57 percent), for research (56 percent), and for chat rooms or e-mail (48 percent).

What are chat rooms and are they harmful?

- Chat rooms are places on the Internet where users can exchange instant messages.
- Access to chat lines can be open (public) or restricted (private).
- Chat rooms usually are not moderated. There is no one to keep the discussion focused on the topic or to try to control inappropriate messages. However, some Internet servers offer monitored chat rooms for various age groups.
- Chat rooms are considered to be the most dangerous area for potential sexual offenses on the Internet.

What are the risks of Internet use by adolescents?

- Internet browsers ("surfers") may come across material that is violent, drug-promoting or otherwise offensive.
- Some information provided online is not accurate. Even sites that look professional may not provide correct information.
- Excessive use of the Internet and time spent sitting at the computer may take important time away from studies, athletics, hobbies or social activities.
- Exposure to violence on the Internet may cause increased aggression, hostility and less sensitivity to suffering in others, as has been shown with watching violent movies and television programs.

What are risks of sexual harm from the Internet?

- One in four adolescents aged 10-17 years who use the Internet report unwanted exposure to sexual material, usually while surfing the Web at home.
- One in five adolescents aged 10-17 years who use the Internet regularly report at least one unwanted invitation to participate in sexual talk or sexual activity or is asked for personal sexual information.

Who is at risk for online sexual offenses?

- Girls are at higher risk than boys for sexual solicitations.

- Older adolescents are more likely to be solicited, because they tend to use the computer unsupervised.
- The risk is increased for those who use the Internet often, participate in chat lines, talk to strangers online, or use the Internet at houses other than their own.
- The risk also is increased for children and adolescents who post personal information, talk with strangers about sex, make rude comments or sexual jokes, or look for X-rated sites.

What can adults do to protect adolescents from the risks of Internet use?

- Adults should learn about the Internet and the information that is available on it.
- Adults should be aware of how, when and where their children and teens use the Internet.
- Adults should support the use of the Internet for homework, reports and the desire to learn more about topics found in other media or in the news.
- Adults should discuss the possible dangers of Internet use with children and adolescents.
- Parents or guardians should monitor and limit the amount of time children spend on the computer and the Websites they visit on the Internet.
- Parents or guardians can ask children to whom and from whom messages are sent.
- Home computers can be kept in a family room or living room where adults can supervise use.
- Parents or guardians can use Internet safeguard functions (software or services that filter or block inappropriate Websites, e-mail, and other materials).
- If a child or adolescent reports getting a message of a sexual nature, adults should not blame or punish the young person, but should use the opportunity to talk about sex. The e-mail should be forwarded to the Internet provider and the provider should be informed that the e-mail is offensive. Many Internet providers have specific e-mail addresses for these types of reports. The police also should be contacted.

What can children and adolescents do to use the Internet safely?

- NEVER give e-mail addresses to anyone whose identity cannot be confirmed.
- NEVER give out personal information such as a home address or telephone number online.
- NEVER agree to meet someone they met only on the Internet.
- Use a fake name for a screen name instead of a real name.
- Do not respond to any message or e-mail that makes them feel uncomfortable. Report these messages to parents, guardians, or other authorities.
- Tell their parents or another trusted adult about any sexual messages or pictures involving children found on the Internet because they are illegal. Unfortunately, most of the time these things are NOT reported to the police, Internet service providers or other authorities.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and Websites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these Websites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these Websites.

American Academy of Family Physicians
11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway
Leawood, KS 66211-2672
Telephone: (913) 906-6000
www.aafp.org or familydoctor.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
Telephone: (847) 434-4000
Fax: (847) 434-8000
www.aap.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
409 12th Street SW
PO Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6290
Telephone: (202) 863-2497
Fax: (202) 484-3917
www.acog.org

American Medical Association
515 North State Street
Chicago, IL 60610
Telephone: (312) 464-5000
www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html

Center for Media Education
2120 L Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20037
Telephone: (202) 331-7833
Fax: (202) 331-7841
www.cme.org

Crimes Against Children Research Center
University of New Hampshire
20 College Road
126 Horton Social Science Center
Durham, NH 03824
Telephone: (603) 862-1888
Fax: (603) 862-1122
www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
699 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3175
Telephone: (703) 274-3900 or 800-THE-LOST
Fax: (703) 274-2222
www.missingkids.org

The Online Safety Project
www.safekids.com

U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Crimes Against Children Program
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 11163
Washington, DC 20535
Telephone: (202) 324-3666
www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm

U.S. Department of Justice
Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
Telephone: 1-800-627-6872 or (301) 519-5500
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

Prepared by the ACOG Committee on Adolescent Health Care. For more information, e-mail adolhlth@acog.org. References available upon request.

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A Parent's Guide to Understanding Online Acronyms

INSTANT MESSAGING WARNING SIGNS

PIR - Parent in room

POS - Parent over shoulder

PRW - Parents are watching

You'll see even more variations on these three ("MOS" or "DOS," depending on which parent you are), but they're all warning signs that your child is sending to her friend. She's telling her friend to step lightly, or to halt the conversation altogether. Exactly what she's trying to hide may be difficult to ascertain. She could be talking to a friend who frequently uses profanity, or perhaps they're gossiping about the latest classroom love triangle.

A/S/L - Age/Sex/Location

"A/S/L" is one of the oldest chat abbreviations. It's efficient, boiling down a trio of questions into just three letters. Why should this send up a red flag if you see it on your child's screen? Because merely asking it indicates that your child is chatting with a stranger, and strangers aren't necessarily being honest about their A, S, or L. One of the fun things about the Internet is that it allows people to make connections they wouldn't otherwise have. But if your child is meeting people online, it's important for you to have a conversation with him about online safety.

RL - Real life

IRL - In real life

LMIRL - Let's meet in real life

Like "A/S/L," "LMIRL" indicates that your child is talking to a stranger. In this case, it's clear that your child intends to meet up with this person offline. Here's a situation where you may need to put aside concerns about invading your child's privacy and ask, point-blank, whom he's talking to.

OTHER INTERNET LINGO

AAK - Asleep at the keyboard

AAR8 - At any rate

AFAIK - As far as I know

AFK - Away from keyboard

ASAP - As soon as possible

ATM - At the moment

ATW - Around the web

B - Back

B4N - Bye for now

BBS - Be back soon

BC - Because

BF - Boyfriend

BFF - Best friend forever

BFN - Bye for now

BG - Big grin

BMG - Be my guest

BOTOH - But on the other hand

BRB - Be right back

BTDT - Been there, done that
BTW - By the way

CD9 - Code 9: Parents nearby
CSL - Can't stop laughing
COZ - Because
CU - See you
CUL or CUL8R - See you later

DQMOT - Don't quote me on this

EZ - Easy
EG - Evil grin

F2F - Face to face
FAQ - Frequently asked questions
FWIW - For what it's worth
FYI - For your information

G2G - Got to go
GAL - Get a life
GF - Girlfriend
GG - Gotta go
GGN - Gotta go now
GL - Good luck
GR8 - Great
GTG - Got to go
GW - Good work

H8 - Hate
HAK - Hugs and kisses

IC - I see
IDC - I don't care
IDK - I don't know
ILY - I love you
IM - Instant message
IMHO - In my humble opinion
IMNSHO - In my not so humble opinion
IMO - In my opinion
IOW - In other words

JK - Just kidding

K - Okay

L8 - Late
L8R - Later
LOL - Laughing out loud

MIRL - Meet in real life
MorF - Male or female

NE - Any
NBD - No big deal
NP - No problem

OIC - Oh, I see
OMG - Oh my God
OTP - On the phone

P911 - Parent emergency
PAW - Parents are watching
PLS - Please
PLZ - Please
POV - Point of view

Q - Question

ROFL - Rolling on floor laughing
ROTFL - Rolling on the floor laughing
RUOK - Are you okay?

SIT - Stay in touch
SOZ - Sorry
SYS - See you soon
S2R - Send to receive

TAFN - That's all for now
TBH - To be honest
THX - Thanks
TTFN - Ta ta for now
TTYL - Talk to you later
TY - Thank you

U - You
U2 - You too

WE - Whatever
WTG - Way to go
WTH - What the hell
WU - What's up?

XO - Hugs and kisses

Y - Why?
YT - You there?



Dealing with Peer Influences

What should you do if your child wants to play with the neighborhood troublemaker? What if he starts hanging out with a youngster who lies, destroys property or bullies other children? What if he begins expressing values or attitudes you do not like? What if he adopts behaviors that are worrisome?

Dealing with negative peer influence is a challenge, but there are solutions. Some parents may demand that their own youngster stop spending time with this bad influence, but this may not be the best strategy. Typically, children adamantly defend such a friend, and they may trivialize or rationalize his faults or shortcomings. They may ignore their parents, finding a way of seeing this playmate anyway. And if they do abide by their parents' wishes, other problems may ensue since the children's own judgment and ability to make wise decisions independently are affected.

In most cases a better strategy is to reinforce positive friendships with other children whose behavior and values meet with your approval. Encourage your youngster to invite these children over to your house to play. Arrange activities that are somewhat structured, mutually enjoyable and time-limited, such as bowling, bicycling or watching a sporting event. Also, arrange summer events (camp, special weekend trips) that bring the children together.

At the same time, do not hesitate to express your displeasure over the less desirable playmates. Speak calmly and rationally when you explain why you would prefer that your child not spend time with them, focusing on specific behavior rather than generalizing or criticizing their character. Let him know the consequences if he ends up adopting the unacceptable behavior that you have seen in these other children, while still not absolutely forbidding him to play with them. This approach will teach your youngster to think more logically and assume responsibility for his actions, and show that you trust his growing capacity to make the right decisions.

Late in the middle years, this type of approach becomes important as peer influences are very evident. Friendships often evolve into highly exclusive cliques in which children strongly influence one another. At most schools there are a variety of cliques, each with its own hierarchy of members. Youngsters' attraction to particular friends may be based on anything from personality to extracurricular interests, from athletic ability to appearance. In these pre-adolescent years, youngsters in tightly knit inner circles may feel quite secure with one another, creating their own group identity by looking and talking alike, perhaps creating a secret handshake, and feeling much more "with it" than those on the outside looking in. These youngsters often feel a strong pressure to dress and talk in a particular way, listen to certain music and wear their hair in a specific style. This peer pressure begins to compete (and sometimes clash) with the influence of parents and their values.

Pre-adolescents also tend to be quite judgmental, labeling others and at the same time becoming increasingly concerned about what their friends think of them. If a peer is even just a little different, they may conclude, "He's terrible; I just hate him."



Communication with Your Adolescent

Adolescence. For your preteen or teenager, this can be a very difficult period. The changes that occur during adolescence are often confusing for both you and your son or daughter. Although this may be a challenging time, it can also be very rewarding to watch your child become an adult. Here are some tips that can help smooth the transition into adulthood for your teen and your family:

- Spend family time with your adolescent. Remember, although many preteens and teens may be more interested in friends, this does not mean they are not interested in family!
- Spend time alone with your adolescent. Even if he or she does not want time alone with you, take a moment here and there to remind your child that your "door is always open;" you are always there if he or she needs to talk. Gentle reminders of this need to occur often.
- When your adolescent talks:
 1. Pay attention.
 2. Watch as well as listen.
 3. Try not to interrupt.
 4. Rephrase his or her words or ask your child to "break it down" to be sure you understand him or her.
 5. If you don't have time to listen right now, set a time when you *do* have time.
 6. It's okay to disagree with him or her, but disagree respectfully, not insultingly.
- Respect your adolescent's feelings. Don't dismiss his or her feelings or opinions as silly or senseless. You may not always be able to help when your child is upset about something, but you can say, "I understand" or "Help me to understand." That's important!
- It's okay to get angry; children at this age can be very frustrating! However, be sure to criticize actions, not character; send "I" not "you" messages.

Example: "I get upset when I find clothes all over the floor" is better than "You're a slob."

- Direct the discussion toward solutions. Be willing to negotiate and compromise. This will teach problem solving in a healthy way.
- When rules need to be set, go ahead and set them! Don't be afraid to be unpopular for a day or two. Believe it or not, adolescents see setting limits as a form of caring.
- Try not to get upset if your adolescent makes mistakes. This will help your adolescent to take responsibility for his or her own actions. Remember to offer guidance when necessary.
- Let your child be the adolescent he or she wants to be, not the one you wish he or she was. Also, try not to pressure your adolescent to be like you were or wish you had been at that age. Be sure to praise your adolescent, not only for success but for the effort as well.
- Be a parent first, not a pal. Your adolescent's separation from you as a parent is a normal part of development – don't take it personally.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. Some little annoying things that adolescents do may not be worth a big battle – let them go. Give your teen some leeway with regard to clothes, hairstyle, etc. Many teens go through a rebellious period in which they want to express themselves in ways that differ from and frequently annoy their parents. However, stay

- aware of the messages and ratings of the music, movies, and video games to which your child is exposed.
- Don't be afraid to share with your adolescent that you have made mistakes as a parent. A few parenting mistakes aren't that crucial. Parents also should share with their teens some mistakes they made as adolescents.
 - Talk to your pediatrician if you are having trouble with your adolescent. He or she may be able to help you and your preteen or teen find ways to get along.

Finally, keep an open line of communication. If you find talking with your child difficult, try writing notes or simply listening. Also, talk to your pediatrician; he or she is there to help both you and your adolescent.

Coping with the problems of adolescence may seem too much for you to take at times, but the important thing to remember is you will make it through your child's teenage years.

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