

## Family Conflict Guidelines

### **Don't bring up past conflicts, focus on the issue at hand.**

*"Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."*—Proverbs 17:9 (NIV)

As we've mentioned before, settled disputes have to be laid to rest; there must be closure. Bringing up past conflicts is strictly off-limits. In the Gospels, when did Jesus ever remind someone of their forgiven past?

### **No put-downs or name-calling.**

Words that the world uses such as *idiot, slob, jerk, dumb*, or even *shut up* have no place in a Christian's vocabulary or home. According to our Lord, to call someone such terms is to make us "subject to hellfire" (Matthew 5:22 HCSB).

### **No sarcasm, ridicule, or insults.**

Making jokes about people or their behavior is sinful towards God and detrimental towards others. It creates an environment of hostility and cynicism. Sarcasm, ridicule, and insulting words are expressions of anger through the vehicle of humor.

### **No exaggerating.**

An easy way to lose credibility is to overstate your case or to shortchange the other person's side in a conflict. State your case fairly and honestly and give the other person credit where they deserve it. Another important aspect of exaggeration to avoid is in the use of *always* and *never*. Rather than saying that something always happens, it is better to say it happens *frequently, regularly, or often*.

### **No venting of anger.**

*"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*—Ephesians 4:31–32 (NIV)

Many times, people act as though the person who has the loudest voice wins. Often, it's a power play, a sign of frustration, immaturity, or a lack of self-control. In actuality, anything that is said in anger can be conveyed just as well in a normal speaking voice. 1 Corinthians 13 tell us that love is patient, and this is precisely the virtue that is needed to work things out according to God's procedures and according to His timing. When we show anger, we show pride we say, in effect, "I deserve better than this and I demand my rights!" The only person who really did deserve better treatment was Christ, and He was patient towards those who mistreated Him.

**No punishment or revenge.**

*"Evil will never leave the house of one who pays back evil for good."*—Proverbs 17:13 (NIV)

*"Do not say, 'I'll do to them as they have done to me; I'll pay them back for what they did.'"*—Proverbs 24:29 (NIV)

This is very destructive. Parents have the authority to punish their children, but adults don't have the right to punish other adults—we're not talking about the criminal justice system here. Revenge is also forbidden in a relationship, just as it is towards anyone who hurts us. Being a vengeful person is the exact opposite of being a peacemaker.

**No "silent-treatment" or avoidance.**

Ephesians 4:26 instructs us to not let the sun go down on our anger. Being so upset with someone that you attempt to punish them by giving them the "silent-treatment" does not reflect the heart or example of Christ. Refusing to talk is just as much a symptom of anger as shouting is. There are cases, though, where it might be best for a time to keep silent or give someone space, to agree to step away from the fight to calm down, but only if **not** done out of anger or spite.

**Don't expect people to read your mind.**

Beware of thinking *This person should know that I like that* or *This person should know that I hate it when they do that thing*. These may be expectations from your family background or upbringing, but it's important to realize ahead of time that others don't share all your experiences and may have different opinions formed over the years.

**Avoid judging motives.**

*"Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts."*—Proverbs 21:2 (NASB)

Since we can never see into the heart, we must be very careful about interpreting someone's behavior and judging their motivations. We look at the behavior, the Lord looks at the heart. You don't have to say everything you think—avoid unnecessary or unproductive comments (Ephesians 4:29).

Just because two people may be very open with each other doesn't mean that they are allowed to gush out with an unrestrained openness. Before saying something questionable, ask yourself: *Is this necessary? Will it further godliness? Will this contribute towards a solution? Is this pertinent to what we're discussing? Will my saying this be more likely to help or to hurt?*

**CONCLUSION:**

Relationships are an important part of our overall discipleship as Christians. Christ, who is the Lord of life, is also to be the Lord of our conflicts. By using God's wisdom and God's principles in our disagreements, we can maximize our unity, exercise our love, and grow in Christian character. Our lives and relationships will be marked by the difference that Christ alone makes and will be a shining testimony in a selfish and uncaring world.