Tips for Resolving Conflicts

~ Define the conflict or problem. Make sure that everyone involved understands the real conflict or problem. Sometimes people involved in an argument hold different perspectives of the actual problem. A student caught cheating on an exam may believe the parent is upset because the child was caught, when parent is upset about the cheating, not about getting caught.

~ Listen to all perspectives. Even after the problem is defined, people involved in arguments still fail to understand the relevance of another person’s perspective if it differs from their own. Listen to the other person’s feelings and thoughts. Be empathetic and try to view the problem from another point of view.

~ Let the angry person vent. Sometimes an angry person just needs to get the anger out in the open, so we have to let the argument get worse before we can work at solving a problem. Allowing the person to have a say without reacting to it in any way, often diffuses the situation. Anger feeds anger, but if the person on the receiving end of the yelling refuses to become angry in return, the person yelling will eventually run out of steam. After a time, real discussion of the underlying problem can take place.

~ Be a good listener and listen to the underlying problem. Often someone we love becomes upset with us and lashes out in anger. The subject of the person’s anger may only be trigger for a deeper problem. It is important to listen closely to the request a person may be making underneath the actual attack. It may have little to do with the topic that started the argument.

~ Find the facts and do research. Too many arguments are based on false assumptions or erroneous facts. A mother is upset with a daughter for missing piano lesson, but the mother failed to listen to the daughter’s explanation that she had a report due in biology and needed to work at the library instead of attending her lesson. A father charges at his son caught cheating before he hears his son’s version. The son thought the test was open notes; otherwise, he would not have been filing through his papers during the exam. Be sure the facts are clearly established before beginning a discussion.

~ Find a compromise. In this world few of us get to have things our way 100% of the time. Instead, it is important to state the terms that are non-negotiable, the items that you can concede, and work toward a win-win solution for everyone.

~ Ask for the other person’s ideas or solutions. A sometimes simple beginning in an argument is to ask, how can we fix this? The question focuses on solutions instead of problems, and possible solutions should be the focus of the conversation.

~ Move to common ground and make peace. Sometimes an argument requires everyone to step away from the hot issues and return to the topics they do agree upon. For instance, when a father and son are fighting about curfew hours, the son is determined to stay out late and the father is determined to keep to the agreed curfew. Neither is going to influence the other without some bargaining tools. The son who wants to stay out 2 hours past curfew because it’s prom night might open by talking about the chores the son has agreed to do for the father. If the son offers to mow the lawn on Saturday even though it isn’t his chore, the father may be willing to concede and let the son stay out an hour or two past curfew this one time.

~ Call in the reserves! When a crisis occurs in a community, law enforcement often calls in reserves to help them handle the crisis. We can do the same, especially with family conflicts. Asking an objective person to listen to the argument and mediate can bring about peaceful resolution to situations, helping two parties come to common ground when the people involved can’t seem to find neutral territory. Having someone mediate during an argument allows for compromise to occur.

~ Cherish those people dear to you. Often in heated arguments, we say something hurtful to people we love and we can never take it back. Don’t allow hurtful comments to slip out without thinking. When angry, take a deep breath, count to ten, and remind yourself of the long-term commitment you have to this relationship with a parent or sibling. Two brothers will be brothers forever, but the girl these boys are fighting about may only be a friend for a short time.