

RESOLVING FAMILY CONFLICTS

Every family experiences conflict from time to time. Conflict is a normal part of intimacy and life together. Resolving the conflict, however, depends on positive communication among family members. We have to be good listeners, to presume each others good will and to be willing to make some changes in the way we do things in our family, if we hope to successfully resolve conflicts in the family.

When your family is in conflict, and all of you want to “restart” your relationship on a more trusting note, try to follow a process similar to the one submitted here. Remember, this is only a suggestion, and your family is unique. Modify this procedure to fit your needs.

1. **SET ASIDE TIME FOR CLEARING THE AIR IN THE FAMILY.** It’s hard to resolve conflicts with everyone distracted or preoccupied. Take a few minutes before or after dinner, before watching T.V., at bedtime, etc.
2. **DEFINE THE PROBLEM.** Let the family member express the hurt. Try to listen to each other without explaining what “the person’s problem is.” Clarify by saying, “What I hear you saying is...”
3. **BE WILLING TO COMPROMISE AND CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR.** Most family conflicts can be resolved by a flexible attitude, a willingness to compromise or change. Healing may require new patterns of behavior, e.g., “From now on I will try to avoid doing...because I know now that I hurt you when I do that.”
4. **ASK FOR FORGIVENESS.** The person who has been hurt needs to hear “I’m sorry” and a request for forgiveness.
5. **FORGIVE AND FORGET.** True forgiveness means putting the hurt out of mind and resuming loving actions toward each other.
6. **TRUST EACH OTHER’S GOOD WILL.** When you forgive, believe that the other person is trying their best to live up to the agreement to change even if it happens again.
7. **ASK THE WHOLE FAMILY’S FORGIVENESS.** When a conflict involves two family members, the rest of the family suffers from the dissension and needs to be healed, too. Ask the family for forgiveness for upsetting them.
8. **CELEBRATE YOUR RECONCILIATION.** Follow up with a special ritual or activity together. Keep it short and simple, e.g., a prayer, a hug, a handshake, dessert.

Adapted from Reconciliation Catechesis Guidelines. Archdiocese of Louisville: Office of Lifelong Formation and Education, 1994.