

Dealing with conflict

Hints and Tips

For many people finding a way to let go of anger and hurt is very difficult – especially after a relationship ends. However, the thing that hurts children most is conflict between their parents. Finding the way to have a relationship with your ex – who is also your child's other parent – is one of the most important things you can do to help your children.

Below are a few hints and tips that you may find helpful

- **What is making you angry?** Knowing and understanding what is at the base of your anger is an important step towards resolving it for yourself. Are there things that still need to be said? Write it out, talk to a neutral friend or think about using some counselling to help you
- **All passion (and anger is a passion) is a form of attachment** – do you still need that attachment? If you do, think about getting some support to look at why that is so – and how you can move on from it. Short term, specialist counselling might be an option to help you understand what is happening and how to deal with it
- **Anger and conflict can be addictive** – are you secretly enjoying it? Sometimes, conflict becomes addictive – it can give you an adrenaline rush that carries you over other feelings of unhappiness, frustration or disappointment. Like every other addiction however, it is harmful – and you need to do it more and more to get the same kick – and you may find the downside is increasing unhappiness with yourself – and real damage to those around you – especially children. If this is happening to you – get some help to deal with it and to find more positive ways of dealing with the situation
- **You may have every right to hate your ex** – but you do have a responsibility to work with your children's other parent to ensure your children grow up with a happy relationship with each and both of their parents
- **Whose war is it?** Sometimes we can be very influenced by other people, their views or their agendas. Is keeping this conflict going influenced by others? A friend, perhaps other members of your family? Taking control and doing what you think is best will be tough – but you need to do it. Enlist the help of others – neutral friends, other family members – and stick to what you know is right. If others want a war that's their choice – but don't let it influence yours.
- **It takes two to make a war** – why not step away? Be clear, the war is over for you – and concentrate on your future. Expect that you may have to have several attempts at truly stepping away – if the conflict has been long-term, there will be skirmishes before ceasefire finally breaks out! So don't give up if you, or the strategy, fails initially.
- **Have a 'time out' rule** – it's tempting to respond immediately to an attack – especially when we all have such ready access to mobile phones, text and email. Whatever your immediate response – don't send it until you have calmed down. Look at it again with an objective eye. Would you send it to someone you work with – or to a friend you had fallen out with? How would you explain it to your children? If the same happens in a direct contact with your ex – simply step away. Explain that you will contact them once you have had time to think.
- **Are you stuck** – Sometimes, we simply get stuck in patterns of behaviour – often, those patterns may have been what led to a relationship ending. One of you needs to change things – make it different – why not you?
- **Look after yourself** – it is really important – especially if you are a parent, to look after yourself – being angry and in conflict with another person is exhausting and damaging. Why not spend the time you would have spent going over old hurts and plotting a response to the latest salvo on caring for yourself instead?
- **Put your children first** – conflict is damaging, conflict is happening between the two people they love best in the world, very much so. Do you want that for your children?
- **Point scoring is tempting in any conflict** – but who gets hurt? You may think it is your ex – would you feel quite so good about it if it's your children who ultimately get hurt the most?
- **Think about what you are teaching your children** – do you want them to start using your tactics? Do you need to be in a war with them too? If they see that the way to deal with conflict is by having – and maintaining a war – how will that affect their lives – and potentially their relationship with you and with others?

- **Re-set your default** – if your default setting has become one of hostility – find a way to re-set. Can't stand your ex? That's fine – but s/he is your child's other parent – only think of them in that way – and link that to what you know your child should expect from each of you.
- **Don't dwell on your anger** – it's tempting to sit and mull over every unkind word or action – or to plot your response. Don't – set yourself a rule, when you start to slip into doing this – find a distraction. Phone a neutral friend, be honest with them that you need a distraction – go for a coffee or for a walk. Don't let your anger own you
- **Think about how you deal with conflict in another setting** – where having a war is not an option. If you don't get on with someone at work for example – you still have to have a professional relationship – how do you deal with that? Are there lessons you can use in your relationship with your ex?
- **Re-establish some (self) respect** – think about whether you would speak to anyone else in the way you speak to your ex – if the answer is no – then you may need to think very carefully about re-establishing some level of respect between you – especially as your children's parents. Help your children learn about respecting others by showing them that you can have a respectful relationship with their other parent
- **Get a life! If you're using the latest instalment of your conflict as a means of keeping interest or friendship** – think again. Ultimately, people have other things to gossip about – or they just get bored – or embarrassed at your behaviour. Be honest with your friends - and ask them to stop you if you get into a loop about your hostility. Get your friends to help you move forward, come with you to take up a new interest or hobby – or just to enjoy a new social life
- **Conflict and bitterness affect your personality** – and may affect your physical and mental health. As a parent, you need to be around – and well – to raise your children. Freeing yourself from conflict and bitterness will pay dividends for you – spend your time thinking about reclaiming your personal happiness and your future – not dwelling on past hurts
- **Work on your self-esteem** – sometimes hanging on to anger and hostility can be about having hurt pride, feeling betrayed or embarrassed, or having failed – or simply feeling that you're the one that has been used. All these things are linked to how we view ourselves – and our self esteem. Being able to like and validate yourself can help a lot. Look at the things you have done and do well – believe in yourself and your talents. Getting a friend to help you see things – and yourself – in the positive can help, or think about using a professional to help you.
- **Be proud of yourself** – for doing what is right for your children – and for yourself

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