

Helping Children Learn to Manage and Resolve Conflict Peacefully

*“Remember to not only say the
right thing in the right place
but far more difficult still,
to leave unsaid the wrong thing
at the tempting moment.”*

—Benjamin Franklin

Module 3.7

Communicating within the Family

Helping Children Learn to Manage and Resolve Conflict Peacefully

This module can be adapted as a four-week series by dividing it into the four categories under Section III.

Materials

- ▶ Name tags
- ▶ Trifold parent handout
- ▶ Chart No. 1: STOP!
- ▶ Handout No. 1: *Do's and Don'ts When Angry*
- ▶ Handout No. 2: *Family Guidelines for TV Viewing*
- ▶ Handout No. 3: *Guidelines for Family Meetings*
- ▶ Handout No. 4: *It Makes a Difference*
- ▶ Activity supplies
- ▶ Chalkboard or chart tablet

References

- ▶ *Raising Positive Children in a Negative World* by Zig Ziglar, Publisher: Thomas Nelson, 2002
- ▶ *Family Communication* by Sven Wahlroos, Publisher: NTC Publishing Group, 1995
- ▶ *When Families Fight*, by Drs. Jeffrey and Carol Rubin, Publisher: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1990
- ▶ *The Hitting Habit* by Jeanne P. Deschner, Publisher: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1984
- ▶ *Anger* by Carol Tavris, Publisher: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1983
- ▶ *Helping Children Learn Right from Wrong* by Sidney B. Simon and Sally Wendkos Olds, Publisher: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1976

Additional Readings for Parent Educators

- ▶ *The Family Fight* by Barry Fish, Publisher: Continental Atlantic Publications, Inc., 2003
- ▶ *Volcano in My Tummy* by Elaine Whitehouse, Publisher: New Society Publishers, 1998
- ▶ *7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* by Stephen R. Covey, Publisher: Golden Books Publication, 1997

Lesson Objectives

- ▶ Recognize that conflict in families and society is normal
- ▶ Identify family patterns that can encourage peaceful conflict resolution in the home and in society

- Recognize how exposure to violence can affect children
- Learn how to hold family meetings

The Lesson

I. Introduction

Welcome participants. If this is not the first session of a series, recap last week's topic and ask for feedback on any homework assignments or observations.

Conflict and emotionally charged situations are something that few of us are ever comfortable with, and yet they are a natural part of everyday life. Discord between spouses, between siblings or peers, parents and children, and even individuals we hardly know, cannot be totally avoided. Regardless of how skilled we are at dodging or resolving conflict, it is inevitable that we will be challenged by confrontational situations from time to time.

Ask participants if they can remember some of the typical fights and disagreements they had as children. Perhaps they were arguments over who would get the biggest piece of cake, someone cutting in line at the drinking fountain, or disagreements over the rules of a game. (*Or use participants' examples.*) Such disputes may have ended with name calling or even a scuffle. A bloodied nose or a black eye was the ultimate infraction.

Conflict today has taken on a whole new dimension. Fights among some children are ending in brutal beatings or even death. Their tools of trade are knives, lead pipes, or guns. Innocent children are being attacked because they run with an opposing group or they are wearing a coveted pair of tennis shoes. People are being shot behind the wheel of their cars because they inadvertently irritated another driver. Children are killing parents over family disagreements. Churches and synagogues are being desecrated and burned because of racial or religion bias. It is quite evident that there is a growing disregard for human life and the rights, beliefs, and property of others, especially among our youth.

Hatred, prejudice, and violence are permeating our society. No longer can any of us feel a sense of safety and security. Whether directly or indirectly, each and every one of us is affected. Such destructive attitudes and behaviors are tearing apart the very fabric of our society.

The American Psychological Association believes that the only way we will slow or even reverse this tide of conflict and violence in our country is to begin by teaching children conflict resolution and mediation skills at a very young age.

Research indicates that conflict styles are shaped early in childhood. It is within the family that children form their attitudes and the foundation for a lifetime of responding to conflict. Whether our children resort to peaceful, creative problem solving or guns and physical violence may easily be predetermined by the environment of the family. Simply equipping them with basic conflict skills will not be enough.

The world our children are inheriting is a very pluralistic, interdependent society, filled with diversity. It will require that they master a greater complexity of values and skills in order to function effectively and contribute positively to society.

II. Group Activity No. 1

Provide parents with prepared sentence strips. (See directions) Display the two diagrams, Peaceful Home and Conflictual Home, and have participants place their sentence strips where they feel appropriate. Involve them in discussion about the comparison of the two and how each of the characteristics might influence a child. Leave the diagrams on display for the remainder of the class.

III. Instruction

If we are to teach our children to value and respect others, we must look much more deeply than simple conflict skills. Note the items that pertain to the following categories on the Peaceful Home diagram:

- ✓ Role Modeling
- ✓ Dealing with Anger
- ✓ Exposure to Violence
- ✓ Teaching Children Conflict Resolution Skills

We will look at each of these categories in more detail.

A. Role Modeling

While our children will have many role models in their lives, parents are clearly the most powerful influence. There is a natural tendency for children to emulate their parents' behaviors and attitudes. The way Mom and Dad treat family members, their attitudes towards others, and how they handle conflict and anger greatly affects how children will handle their own relationships and disagreements for a lifetime.

It is critical that children learn from their most important role models a respect for the rights, property, and feelings of others, as well as a respect for value and belief systems that differ from their own.

Have participants write down ideas of how they might promote this type of respect within the home.

Examples:

- ✓ Model responsible behaviors and attitudes on a daily basis
- ✓ Share openly within the family your values and beliefs
- ✓ Treat others with respect
- ✓ Demonstrate respect for varying beliefs, cultures, and differences
- ✓ Discuss openly as a family acts of injustice, prejudice, and violence that occur in society
- ✓ Develop friendships with people of other cultures, races, and abilities; encourage your children to do the same
- ✓ Practice positive conflict resolution skills

In past decades, it was often thought that children should never witness conflicts between their parents. Today we know that exposure to mild parental conflict can be healthy for children. Ask participants what positives can be gained by such exposure.

Examples:

- ✓ Recognizing that conflict is normal
- ✓ Realizing that people can love and respect one another and still have differing opinions and viewpoints
- ✓ Learning appropriate ways to handle conflict

The critical key is for Mom and Dad to model creative responses to conflict and to express love and respect for one another both during and following any disagreements. Disagreements of a more serious nature should be kept behind closed doors. Be aware, however, that children of all ages can sense discord in their parents' relationship. (*The facilitator may wish to expand this segment with Extender No. 1: When Parents Fight.*)

B. Dealing with Anger

Anger is perhaps the most poorly handled emotion in society. Children need to understand that anger is simply a feeling and that feelings are neither good nor bad. How anger is expressed is the key to whether it is healthy or destructive.

Anger is a high energy emotion, meaning that it is often expressed with a great deal of energy (slamming doors, yelling, ranting and raving, etc.). Or, in some instances, it is suppressed, only to surface in passive aggressive or destructive behaviors.

Individuals can have very different ways of expressing anger. It is important for parents to model appropriate expressions of anger and also help their children find healthy ways of releasing their anger.

Use Activity No. 2: How Children May Respond to Highly Charged Situations and Activity No. 3: Anger Responses in Children to demonstrate the various ways children (and adults) may respond when angry.

As you briefly discuss the following, you may also want to give parents Handout No. 1: Do's and Don'ts When Angry.

Do's

- ✓ Calm down
- ✓ Try to understand the source of your anger
- ✓ Be assertive through negotiation and compromise
- ✓ Seek help when nothing seems to be working

Don'ts

- ✓ Get personal
- ✓ Avoid the issue
- ✓ Get out of control
- ✓ Make accusations
- ✓ Sulk
- ✓ Try to get even

When someone else is angry

- ✓ Remain calm (don't respond in kind)
- ✓ Try to understand the underlying cause
- ✓ Be considerate (encourage the other person to talk)
- ✓ Be a good listener (respond reflectively)
- ✓ Try to negotiate a compromise

Expressing anger constructively or channeling it appropriately are the tools for building trust, respect and mutual understanding. Unmanaged conflict and emotions can take a heavy toll on everyone involved.

C. Exposure to Violence

Ask participants to identify how today's children gain exposure to violence. List their ideas on a chalkboard or tablet.

Activity No. 4: Repeated Exposure to Violence: A Demonstration: Provide participants with miniature candy bars advising them to go ahead and eat them. Now inform them that the candy bar they have just consumed has ____ number of calories and ____ number of fat grams.

True, this one candy bar will not significantly affect their weight, cholesterol, or dental health. But what would happen if they had a steady diet of these candy bars? Obviously, their weight, cholesterol and dental health would be affected in a very negative way.

Frequent exposure to violence and conflict takes a similar toll on children. Children can have a steady diet of these negative influences through television, video games, toys, music, and even more devastating, verbal and physical violence in the home. Over time, they become desensitized to violence and are likely to exhibit aggressive, violent behavior themselves or develop emotional problems. Even one-time exposures can have negative effects on behavior, sleep patterns, and more.

Studies strongly indicate that children who are subjected to physical punishment are very vulnerable to serious emotional problems, low self-esteem, and will generally mimic like behaviors with siblings, peers, and future spouses and children. Furthermore, these children often become fearful, hostile, and distrustful towards their parents.

Toys that depict fighting and violence, such as guns and knives, have been proven to encourage aggressive and violent behaviors in many children. (*Ask parents which toys are on the market currently that they think might contribute to violence.*) Television, music, and video games are filled with violence and must be carefully monitored. (*You might want to play music or a video that promotes violence and other negative messages.*)

There is a growing consensus among researchers that television and video game violence does have a negative affect on children. Considering the following:

- ✓ Children in the United States watch an average of three to five hours of television every day. By the time they graduate from high school they will have logged 20,000 hours in front of the TV. This compares to approximately 13,000 hours spent in school. —*American Academy of Pediatrics*
- ✓ The average child or teen views 10,000 murders, rapes, and aggravated assaults on television each year. —*American Psychological Association*
- ✓ Children's TV shows contain about 20 violent acts each hour. —*Gerbner, University of Pennsylvania*
- ✓ American television and movies are the most violent in the world. —*American Academy of Pediatrics*
- ✓ Violence on TV is often portrayed as funny and painless. —*American Academy of Pediatrics*
- ✓ Over 1,000 studies and reviews indicate that exposure to large doses of television violence increases the likelihood of aggressive behaviors, particularly in males. —*American Academy of Pediatrics*

The following list is several of the major effects television violence has on children:

- ✓ They become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.
- ✓ They are more fearful of the world around them.
- ✓ They are more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others and gradually accept violence as a way to solve problems.
- ✓ They imitate the violence they observe on television.

Source: *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*

Ask parents to share their ideas on creative ways to monitor or limit children's television viewing.

Briefly discuss Handout No. 2: Family Guidelines for TV Viewing. You may also want to provide Extender No. 2: Television Checklist as a homework assignment.

IV. Teaching Children Conflict Resolution Skills

Research indicates that our conflict styles are shaped when we are very young. The earlier participants can begin to teach practical skills to children, the more skilled and creative they will become at solving problems and resolving conflicts. Siblings generally present the first challenges to conflict. Sibling rivalry can be covered in another session. There are three important points parents should keep in mind: (1) avoid becoming involved in children's conflicts, (2) encourage children to seek their own solutions to their disagreements, and (3) prohibit any physical or verbal abuse.

There are many conflict resolution styles, but most seem to have the same basic components. The following style is perhaps an easy one for children to remember and its use of a hand symbol makes it easy for parents to simply raise an open hand as a reminder that children need to use the *STOP* guidelines. Parents can also learn about the conflict resolution format being taught in schools and then use that technique at home.

Demonstrate with Chart No. 1: STOP!

Family meetings can provide a wonderful and natural opportunity to help children learn to resolve conflict and to be creative problem solvers. If done on a consistent basis, they provide a forum for families to work out problems, assign responsibilities, and address other issues of importance. *Provide participants with Handout No. 3: Guidelines for Family Meetings, and briefly go over each of the steps.*

V. Closing

As a homework assignment, suggest that participants set aside 30 minutes for a family meeting in the upcoming week. (Another homework activity might also be Extender No. 2: TV Checklist.)

The obvious signs of conflict, prejudice, and violence are all around us. The greatest contribution each of us can make in turning the tide of such destructiveness in our society is to begin within our own families. By creating a harmonious home environment and teaching positive values and skills, we can become a powerful influence in helping our children learn to function and thrive in a society where conflict, strife, and opposing points of view will always be a part of life.

Close by reading Handout No. 4: "It Makes A Difference."

Chart

- Chart No. 1: *STOP!*

Activities

- Activity No. 1: *In Which House Do Your Children Live?*
- Activity No. 2: *How Children May Respond to Highly Charged Situations*
- Activity No. 3: *Anger Responses in Children*
- Activity No. 4: *Repeated Exposure to Violence*

Handouts

- Handout No. 1: *Do's and Don'ts When Angry*
- Handout No. 2: *Family Guidelines for TV Viewing*
- Handout No. 3: *Guidelines for Family Meetings*
- Handout No. 4: *"It Makes a Difference"*

Extenders

- Extender No. 1: *When Parents Fight*
- Extender No. 2: *Television Checklist*
- Extender No. 3: *Foul Play in Conflict Situations*

Complementary Modules

- Module 3.3: *Expressing and Communicating Feelings and Emotions*
- Module 3.6: *Dealing with Anger in the Family*
- Module 5.4: *Dealing with Sibling Rivalry*

Suggested Reading for Parents

- *Raising Positive Children in a Negative World* by Zig Ziglar, Publisher: Thomas Nelson, 2002
- *Family Communication* by Sven Wahlroos, Publisher: NTC Publishing Group, 1995
- *Taming the Dragon in Your Child: Solutions for Breaking the Cycle of Family Anger* by Meg Eastman and Sydney C. Rozen, Publisher: Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated, 1994
- *Teaching Your Children Values* by Linda Eyre and Richard Eyre, Publisher: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1993
- *When Families Fight* by Drs. Jeffrey and Carol Rubin, Publisher: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1990
- *Unplugging the Plug-In-Drug* by Marie Winn, Publisher: Penguin Group (USA), 1987
- *What to Do After You Turn Off the TV: Fresh Ideas for Enjoying Family Time* by Frances Moore Lappe, Publisher: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1985
- *Mind & Media* by Patricia Greenfield, Publisher: Harvard University Press, 1984
- *Anger* by Carol Tavris, Publisher: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1983
- *Helping Children Learn Right from Wrong* by Sidney B. Simon and Sally Wendkos Olds, Publisher: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1976

Suggested Parenting Quick Tips

- *Dads and Teen Daughters... Investing in a Special Relationship*
- *De-Stressing Your Family!*
- *Discipline or Punishment? There is a Difference!*
- *He Hit Me First!*
- *How to Communicate With Children*
- *Is Your Child the Target of Bullying?*
- *Moms and Sons*
- *Nobody Likes Me*
- *Parenting the Strong-Willed Child*
- *Parents and School Safety*
- *Play Groups for Young Tots*

Lesson Activity

Identify the strengths within your home which you feel will help your children develop life-long skills for responding to conflict and highly charged situations.

Identify those areas that you would like to see your family improve.

Practical Parent Education

The future of America rests in its homes.
- Abraham Lincoln

Parenting is perhaps the most important role in society. Children are our future. And yet, rearing children is a challenging and complicated task. All parents need support, education and resources as they strive to promote the healthy development of their children in what has become a very complex world. Your community is committed to providing you with quality services through Practical Parent Education as you strive to rear responsible, self-confident, mentally healthy children.

For further information regarding services offered in your community, contact:

Practical Parent Education is a primary prevention program.



Practical Parent Education

Module 3.7

Helping Children Learn to Manage and Resolve Conflict Peacefully

“Remember to not only say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong things at the tempting moment.”

—Benjamin Franklin

Lesson Objectives

- To recognize that conflict in family and society is normal
- To identify family patterns that can encourage peaceful conflict resolution in the home and in society
- To recognize how exposure to violence can impact children
- To develop skills for both parents and children for creative responses to conflict
- To learn how to hold family meetings

Suggested Reading for Parents

- *7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* by Stephen Covey
- *When Families Fight* by Drs. Jeffrey & Carol Rubin
- *Teaching Children Values* by Linda & Richard Eyre
- *The Family Fight* by Barry Fish
- *Positive Discipline* by Jane Nelsen
- *Taming the Dragon in Your Child* by Meg Eastman

For Children:

- *Volcano in My Tummy* by Elaine Whitehouse
- *When Emily Woke Up Angry* by Riana Duncan
- *Don't Rant and Rave on Wednesdays* by Adolph Moser
- *A Family That Fights* by Sharen Bernstein
- *How I Learned to be Considerate of Others* by Lawrence Shapiro

- *Sometimes I Like to Fight, But I Don't Do It Much Anymore* by Lawrence Shapiro

Lesson Concepts

Today's children are living in a highly complex society where conflict, bias and violence are becoming far too common occurrences. The greatest protection we can provide our children is to teach them to respect the rights, beliefs and property of others, as well as skills for responding to conflict and highly charged situations.

Research indicates that attitudes and conflict styles are shaped early in life. Family environments that encompass the following can provide a foundation that will help children develop the complexity of skills and values that help them function effectively in the complex society that they are inheriting.

Parents . . .

- ✓ Model a respect for the rights, property, and beliefs of others
- ✓ Treat all family members with dignity and respect
- ✓ Set firm but loving limits
- ✓ Refrain from physical punishment
- ✓ Prohibit toys and games that depict violence
- ✓ Monitor television viewing
- ✓ Encourage healthy expressions of feelings
- ✓ Actively teach conflict resolution skills

- ✓ Involve children in family decisions and problem solving
- ✓ Hold family members accountable for their actions
- ✓ Educate against the use of drugs and alcohol

Lesson Notes

STOP!

S-Slow down and identify the problem

T-Talk to each other with respect

O-Be open to the other person's
point of view



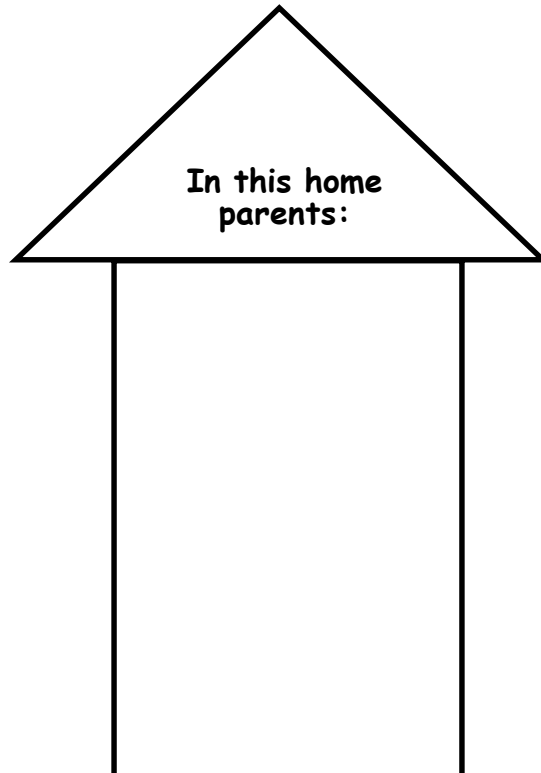
P-Plan a solution that is agreeable to both

In Which House Do Your Children Live?

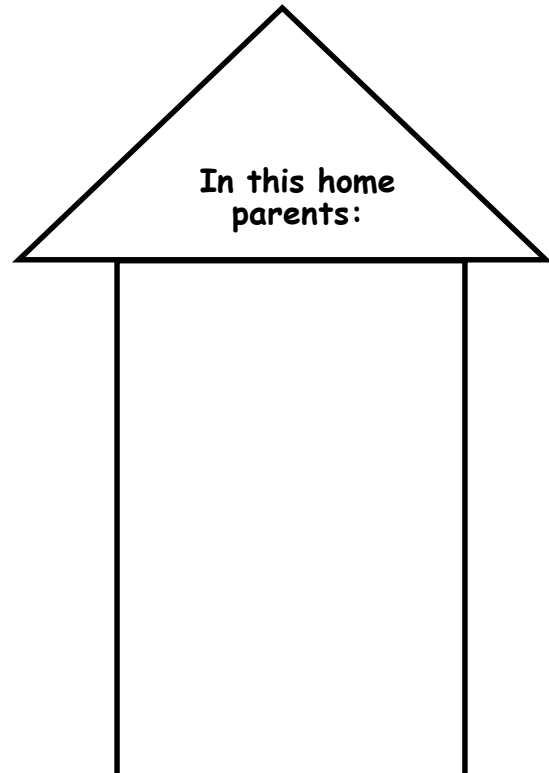
Directions: For this activity you will need to display two large diagrams as shown below. You may use either a chalkboard or chart table. Provide participants with sentence strips with the suggested labels and have them place their strip or strips (depending on size of group) on the appropriate diagram. Involve them in discussion about the comparisons of the two home environments and how each of the characteristics might influence a child. Leave the diagrams on display for the remainder of the class. (You might want to use color-coded sentence strips for each of the four areas of role modeling, anger, violence, and conflict resolution.)

Supplies: Chalkboard or chart tablet, sentence strips, tape

Peaceful Home



Conflictual Home



Sentence Strips

- ✓ Recognize that some conflict in families is normal
- ✓ Role model strong conflict resolution skills
- ✓ Exhibit a high level of conflict
- ✓ Handle their anger in an appropriate manner
- ✓ Express anger inappropriately
- ✓ Make sure their actions reflect their values
- ✓ Send mixed messages
- ✓ Use firm, loving discipline techniques
- ✓ Avoid any forms of harsh physical punishment
- ✓ Tend to be too controlling or too permissive
- ✓ Resort to physical punishment
- ✓ Encourage healthy expressions of feelings and emotions
- ✓ Allow inappropriate expressions of feelings
- ✓ Teach respect for the needs, rights, and beliefs of others
- ✓ Value diversity in their friendships
- ✓ Monitor children's television viewing
- ✓ Provide little restrictions on television viewing
- ✓ Disallow the use of violent toys or video games
- ✓ Teach conflict resolution skills to their children
- ✓ Prohibit physical and verbal abuse among siblings
- ✓ Recognize that sibling rivalry is normal and that it provides an opportunity for children to learn social skills
- ✓ Allow physically and verbally abusive behaviors among siblings
- ✓ Encourage open communication
- ✓ Hold children accountable for their actions
- ✓ Teach children the risks of drugs and alcohol

How Children May Respond to Highly Charged Situations

Materials:

Clear jar or bowl filled with water

Two small stones—representing children who are generally calm, level-headed, and in control

One small sponge—representing children who seem to soak up all that is happening and are deeply affected but may not show it until you squeeze it out of them

Two effervescent tablets—representing children who react strongly and are very overt in their responses

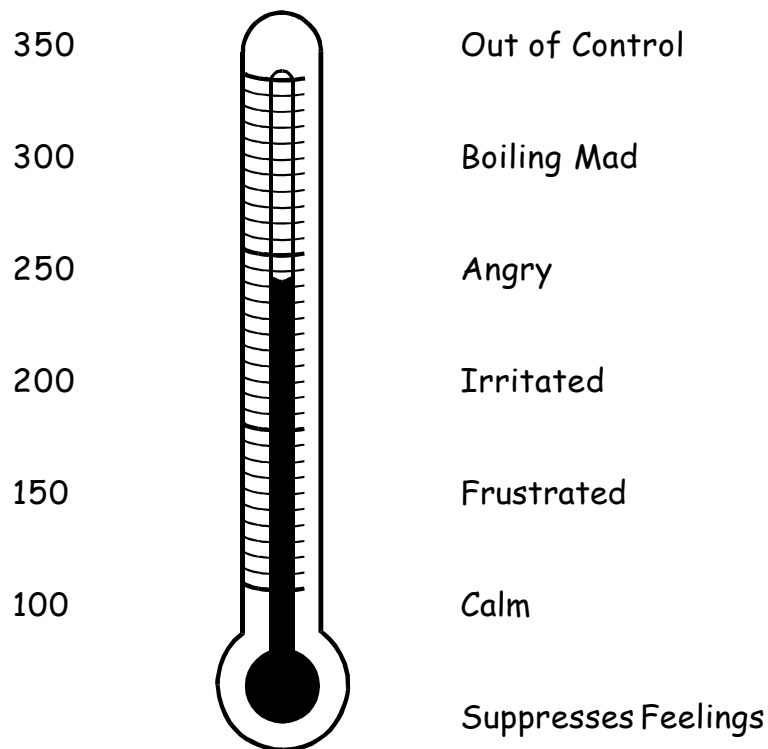
Directions:

As you drop each item into the water, discuss how it represents the various ways children may react or respond to conflict or highly charged situations.

Anger Responses in Children

Directions: With the use of the thermometer below, help parents identify how their children respond to conflictual situations and perhaps how quickly their emotions escalate. Ask how their children express themselves when they are at this point. As a second part to the activity, draw labels from a large jar (or you could use the ping pong balls from Module 3.3) depicting how children often act out their anger. Read several of them to the group.

Supplies: Thermometer (see diagram below), large jar, labels (see Module 3.3, Activity No. 1). Thermometers may be made with foam board and elastic to represent movement. Insert the elastic through the top and bottom of the thermometer. Staple it on the back so that it can still be moved. (Color half of the elastic red.)



Repeated Exposure to Violence

Directions: Provide each participant with a miniature candy bar advising them to go ahead and eat it. After everyone has eaten their candy bar, inform them that they have just consumed _____ calories and _____ fat grams.

Now if we were to each get on a scale, we most likely would not see a weight increase from eating just one candy bar. Nor would we have raised our cholesterol level or gotten a cavity from this candy bar. But, what would happen if we ate a dozen or so each and every day. Obviously, our weight, cholesterol and dental health would be affected in a very negative way.

Frequent exposure to violence and conflict takes a similar toll on children. Children soon become desensitized and apathetic. They may exhibit aggressive or cruel behavior themselves. They may also become so immune that they fail to respond to acts of hatred or violence. Younger children have difficulty distinguishing real life from fantasy and may develop disturbing behaviors, sleep patterns or nightmares.

Do's and Don'ts When Angry

When You Are Angry:

Do

- Calm Down
- Try to understand your motives
- Be assertive through negotiation and compromise
- Seek help when positive efforts aren't working

Don't

- Get personal
- Avoid the issue
- Make accusations or attack
- Sulk or try to get even

When Some Else Is Angry:

Do

Keep your cool (Don't respond in-kind)

Be considerate

Encourage the person to talk

Be a good listener (Respond reflectively)

Look for the underlying cause of the anger

Avoid taking chances

Family Guidelines for TV Viewing

1. Limit viewing for all family members. Children should watch no more than two hours per day. On school days, eliminating TV or limiting it to a shorter time is advisable.
2. Carefully select what to watch. Provide guidance in helping children make their selections. With younger children, consider having them use a highlighter to indicate which programs they want to watch for the week and review their selections with them.
3. Watch some of your children's favorite programs with them to be sure they are appropriate and to expand on them educationally.
4. Use television viewing as a springboard for discussion regarding values, fantasy versus real life, conflict and violence, commercialism, etc. Use open ended questions.
5. Discuss TV violence. Talk about more appropriate means for solving conflict or respecting the rights, property, and feelings of others. Discuss cause and effect.
6. Encourage high quality programming and explain your selections. Point out that appropriate TV selections can be very educational and just as enjoyable.
7. Ban programs that you feel are inappropriate. Explain why. Be a good role model in your own viewing.
8. Find constructive alternatives to watching TV. Encourage outdoor activities, reading, art, hobbies, sports, creative play, family activities, etc.

Guidelines for Family Meetings

Family meetings can provide a wonderful forum for enhancing family life and resolving the many issues that arise on a daily basis. They also create a learning environment where children can develop problem-solving skills, learn to cooperate, and resolve conflict.

Common topics addressed in family meetings are family decisions, chores and responsibilities, planning special events, solving problems and conflicts, recognizing family members for their contributions and successes, and being sensitive to the needs of each family member.

The following ten guidelines will provide a format for effective meetings:

Guidelines

1. Meet at a regularly scheduled time, preferably on a weekly basis. Do not allow telephone calls to disrupt meetings.
2. Place an agenda list in a strategic location, such as a refrigerator, where all family members may list topics to be discussed.
3. Have family members share in the responsibility of chairing meetings with parents modeling the first few sessions. School-age children should be able to handle this responsibility.
4. Record minutes of all meetings, keeping them in a notebook. Children can share this responsibility as well.
5. Hold meetings around a cleared table.
6. Begin meetings on a positive note by complimenting family members or acknowledging appreciation for a good deed.
7. Address all areas of concern. Be certain that each family member has an opportunity to talk or bring up a topic.
8. Avoid allowing meetings to turn into gripe sessions.
9. Limit meetings to 20-30 minutes. It may help to use a timer. Remember that most issues don't have to be resolved at one sitting and may be continued to another meeting.
10. End meetings with a fun family activity or game.

"It Makes a Difference"

The following story, by Loren Eiseley

A well-known author and poet was working and vacationing on the southern coast of Spain. One morning very early, he was walking along the beach; the sun was just rising. While enjoying the beauty about him, he glanced down the beach and saw a lone figure dancing about.

Fascinated by this other person celebrating the day that was about to dawn, he moved closer. As he came nearer, he realized that the young man was not dancing, but in one graceful movement was picking objects up from the beach and was tossing them out into the sea. As he approached the young man, he saw that the objects were starfish.

"Why in the world are you throwing starfish into the water?"

"If the starfish are still on the beach when the tide goes out and the sun rises higher in the sky, they will die," replied the young man as he continued tossing them out to the sea.

"That's ridiculous! There are thousands of miles of beach and millions of starfish. You can't believe that what you are doing could possibly make a difference!"

The young man picked up another starfish, paused thoughtfully and remarked as he tossed it out into the waves, *"It makes a difference to this one."*

When Parents Fight

Mental health professionals now believe that it is not harmful for children to witness mild conflict and disagreements between their parents. In fact, it can be healthy. When handled in a positive manner, children can come to recognize that conflict is normal in loving relationships, that people who love and respect one another can have differing opinions and viewpoints, and that there are productive techniques for handling conflict.

Disagreements of a more serious nature should be kept behind closed doors. Be aware, however, that children of all ages can sense discord in their parents' relationships. This can be very unsettling for children.

Certainly, the use of good negotiation skills is essential. The following points are also important in spousal disagreements:

- ✓ Make sure the disagreement is worth fighting over
- ✓ Recognize that you can disagree and still love each other
- ✓ Stick to the issue
- ✓ Compromise, negotiate and collaborate
- ✓ Keep in mind that there should be no losers
(A loser can always punish the winner)
- ✓ Draw closure with an expression of love and affection
(It is so important for children to see this!)

Television Checklist

This is an activity designed to help you monitor television exposure in your house. We suggest that you complete the checklist with one of today's more controversial programs and with one of the Saturday morning cartoons. You might want to involve children of school age as an educational experience. Good judgement is of course advised.

Directions: Tally the number of incidents as follows.

Program _____	Program _____
_____ Verbal abuse	_____ Verbal abuse
_____ Foul language	_____ Foul language
_____ Fighting	_____ Fighting
_____ Use of weapons	_____ Use of weapons
_____ Murder	_____ Murder
_____ Unrealistic body images	_____ Unrealistic body images
_____ Nudity	_____ Nudity
_____ Rape	_____ Rape
_____ Sexual abuse	_____ Sexual abuse
_____ Sexual activity	_____ Sexual activity
_____ Sexist remarks	_____ Sexist remarks
_____ Racist remarks	_____ Racist remarks
_____ Hurtful remarks	_____ Hurtful remarks
_____ Devaluation of others	_____ Devaluation of others
_____ Disrespect for authority	_____ Disrespect for authority
_____ Threats	_____ Threats
_____ Hitting, slapping, kicking	_____ Hitting, slapping, kicking
_____ Drugs, alcohol, smoking	_____ Drugs, alcohol, smoking

Foul Play in Conflict Situations

