**Understanding and Dealing with Conflict**

**Family and Gender Studies 10-12**

**Abbreviated from *Families Today pages 118-133***

**Conflict: what is it?**

Conflict is a disagreement or struggle between two or more people. It happens when one or more people try to prevent or interfere in some way with the actions or others. Conflict is a part of any close relationship. In fact, the closer your relationship is, the more heated your conflicts can be.

**Handout:** How do you handle conflict?

Take a few minutes to fill out the first two pages of the handout. Aim to describe one example for each of the following types of conflict:

**Situational:** Sometimes a specific situation gives rise to conflict. Situational conflict can occur in all relationships. It can be intense but fortunately, often short lived. ie. Three teens sharing a bathroom in the morning.

**Personality Differences:** Each person’s personality is a different combination of their values and character traits. These can enrich their lives but can also create conflict.Ie. Two brothers share a room: one is loud and messy and the other is quiet and tidy.

**Power Struggles: Power** is the ability to influence another person. Power struggles occur when issues are important to both sides. Using power is one way people get others to agree to their terms. **Control** is the action of directing another person’s behavior. When power is the cause of conflict, the desire for control may get in the way of a solution.

**Think-Pair-Share:**

Team up with one or two other people you trust and don’t mind sharing personal information with. Go over your examples and share your descriptions of conflict with each other. Be prepared to be invited to share out to the class.

**How do resolve a conflict constructively:**

Brainstorm ways you have seen people handle conflict. Think about different types of people: the elderly, the powerful, children, married couples, interfaith relationships, etc. Circle ways that you think are constructive or destructive.

**Resolving Conflicts:**

The family is usually the first setting where children face conflict. They see how conflict is handled between other family members. They also learn attitudes and behaviours about conflict. As they grow older, children’s attitudes and behaviours are also influenced by the media, interactions with other children, and experiences at school.

The goal of **conflict resolution** is to settle conflicts without violence. People can do this if they learn how to correctly resolve conflicts. They can then solve their problems with nonviolent strategies at home, at work, at school, and in the community.

**Steps to resolving conflict constructively:**

**Define the problem.** Constructive conflict resolution begins when both parties agree on what they are fighting about. This step may seem unnecessary, but can be the hardest step! People often assume that they know what the others are thinking. To resolve the conflict, each person needs to acknowledge the other person’s point of view. This can be really hard to do!

**Set limits.** Agree to discuss **only the immediate problem.** Do not bring up issues from the past and aim to not hurl personal attacks.

**Negotiate.** Think of possible solutions to the problem. Listen to the other person’s ideas. Try to find a way to meet in the middle, or compromise, so that each person is giving a little, but also getting their needs met.

**Get outside help.** You might not be able to do this alone in a constructive manner. Find a person who is not involved to help you settle the argument. This can be a friend or counselor; the important thing to remember is that they must be able to remain objective.

**Follow up.** Things may appear to be resolved. Make sure the other person feels this as well. Checking in with each other from time to time can prevent the conflict from happening again.

**TRY THIS:**

The next time you have experienced a conflict with someone and both parties are trying to resolve it, try to argue the other person’s point of view to them. This is very hard at first and you may find yourself being sarcastic! When this happens, you know you are not actually trying hard enough to get to the bottom of it- you still want to be right, right? If you are able to let that feeling go and really want resolution, pretend to be the other person (with their permission) and actually verbally argue *their side to them.*  This will give them the opportunity to correct or confirm your understanding and also has a powerful effect on each person’s ability to empathize. This can work without them, too! Put two chairs across from each other. Sit in one and argue your point; sit in the other and argue *theirs.* Actually get up and move into their seat and speak it out loud. It works!

**Avoiding Conflict:**

**Do not let others irritate you.** Recognize when someone is only **looking for a reaction from you.** Make sure the issue is worth arguing over.

**Focus on the positive.** “What you focus on expands.”

**Change the subject.** Try to turn the conversation onto a less emotional topic.

**Take a personal stand against serious, and especially physical, conflict.** Let others know you will not resort to violence.

**Do not be intimidated or provoked into fighting.** Show your strength by doing what you know is right, not what others expect or want.

**Walk away.** You may realize the conflict is not worth fighting about. Show self respect and confidence by calmly walking away.