

CREATING HELPFUL FAMILY DYNAMICS

To change unhelpful family dynamics: REFLECT on the negative interaction, ANALYSE what was said and done and think about WHAT YOU COULD DO DIFFERENTLY at each stage of the interaction.

It's important to remember-adolescence is a normal stage of development. They're the same young people they've always have been, but are now struggling to cope with growth spurts, sexual development and mood swings, which probably scare them as much as their parents!

The bad news is that the rate and extent of growth and development at adolescence make these particularly challenging years for teenagers and parents/caregivers alike.

The good news is that you have already taught them many skills to help them through these challenging years.

The really good news is that both parents/caregivers and adolescents can learn the new skills they need to cope with the challenges.

In families we all react to situations and to things that other family members do. Often the ways we react begin to form a pattern which is like a habit. Raising some issues with teenagers can be like red rag at a bull. Other issues can trigger anxiety or fear in parents or other family members. The ways we react to each other and to particular situations are our 'family dynamics' and can be either helpful or unhelpful.

Sorting Out Disagreements:

Agree to differ-before you get into the argument, think about the importance of the issue. Will your children's beliefs put them at risk physically or emotionally? If they act on their beliefs, can they learn from their mistakes without doing any major damage? Is the disagreement a battle that you have to win, or a chance to teach your children that it's OK to disagree?

Family Meetings:

The same skills can be used for concerns that involve the whole family particularly, before the issues become major problems. If family meetings are too difficult to manage by yourselves, you could arrange a skilled facilitator from outside the family. She or he needs to be someone you all trust to help you solve your problems without taking sides.

Discussing your Differences:

Sometimes however, the issues are serious and you need to take a stand. Either way it's useful to know how to discuss your different beliefs and values through:

- Examining your own beliefs
- Challenging your own beliefs
- When there's a parenting decision to be made (e.g. whether your fourteen year old should be able to stay out at a party until 2am), parents/caregivers with partners first examine and challenge your beliefs separately. Then share your conclusions, discuss the issue and agree on actions to take.

Using Communication Skills:

- Choose a good time and place
- Be an active listener
- Watch for body language as clues to meaning
- Check when in doubt about what someone is feeling
- Use 'I' statements
- Don't interrupt
- Take a non-judgemental stance
- Show respect for the other person

Getting the Behaviours You Want:

- Give feedback
- Be a good 'coach' to your child, not a controller
- If all else fails- take a stand.

