

Mending Fences with Friends and Family After a Disagreement

There are times when you may need to patch up differences with people close to you, whether it's due to a disagreement about politics, personal beliefs, or other issues. Here are tips to help avoid tension or heated arguments with family and friends, co-workers and acquaintances.

Manage your expectations and emotions

Accept people for who they are. We all have different lives, challenges and life experiences. It's likely you're not going to change other people's feelings or views. But tolerance always makes for better relations, and especially with people you're connected to and love. Make an effort to accept and tolerate a diversity of beliefs, opinions and viewpoints in your circle of family and friends.

Be a good listener. Speak less and listen more. Most of us talk too much. Even 20 seconds of talking can be too long if you don't include the other person in the conversation. Give others the chance to speak, express their views, and be heard. Avoid interrupting. Ask questions—and care about the answer.

Be prepared for how you'll respond should sensitive issues or topics come up. Use strategies to keep your emotions in check that have worked well for you in other situations. You might take a few deep breaths before speaking, try changing the subject, not engage in an argumentative discussion, or excuse yourself to get a drink or walk the dog if the conversation is becoming heated.

Focus on your commonalities, not your differences

Try to remember the many reasons you love your sister or uncle or school classmate, even if your political beliefs are opposed. Focus on the things you have in common and enjoy about one another—your kids or sports or your shared history that stretches back years.

Help clear the air if there has been tension or conflict

A sincere and thoughtful conversation can help to clear the air after a misunderstanding.

Take the initiative. Reach out if you're upset or if someone else is. Resentment may fester if you don't try to clear the air promptly.

Say "I'm sorry" if you may have hurt someone. Accept that you contributed to the tension between you. If you can't sincerely apologize for your part in causing the friction, try: "I'm sorry we aren't in agreement on this."

Don't expect the other person to apologize. It may be too hard for someone else to say "I'm sorry" even if you can. You don't need a formal apology to improve your relationship if the two of you want to mend a fence.

Be a good loser. Don't carry a grudge. If your candidate didn't win an election, for example, or your views didn't prevail on a big issue that involves a friend or relative, try to let it go and say

something positive about the outcome.

Think about following up with a brief email or handwritten message after the conversation.

You might say how important your relationship is to you, and that you're glad you've cleared the air or are looking forward to seeing the person again. A small gesture of reconciliation will reaffirm that you were sincere in wanting to put aside your differences.

Moving forward after a disagreement

Ground rules such as these can help to keep differences from affecting your relationship in the future.

Agree to disagree. Let the other person know you value your relationship even if you don't always see eye-to-eye.

Set boundaries. If certain topics always cause friction between you and someone else, try setting a few limits on your conversations. You might agree that you won't talk about politics or another subject that tends to set one of you off.

Compartmentalize. Focus on the qualities that you admire in a friend or family member. Set the others aside and don't dwell on them. After you've reconciled, don't continue an argument or keep bringing up your differences. Talk about sensitive issues with like-minded people who share your views.

Forgive

Forgiveness is a way to avoid getting stuck in painful emotions and it helps you let go of grudges and resentments that are keeping you from making peace with yourself and others. Research has found that forgiveness can lessen stress, reduce feelings of anger and resentment, lower blood pressure and enhance overall wellbeing.

If you said something you regret, or acted poorly with someone you care about, apologize. Asking for forgiveness is one of the best ways to mend fences.

If someone asks for your forgiveness, try very hard to give it. Forgiving is also one of the best ways to mend fences and repair relationships.

Be patient. Understand that it may take time to reconcile if you or the other person has said or done something offensive or hurtful, or if the other person isn't willing to mend a fence right now. Be persistent and keep at it if the relationship is important.

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