

# about conflict



Experiencing conflict in our families is nothing new. What is new is the unprecedented amount of togetherness we are experiencing with our family members since COVID-19 changed everything. As a result, tensions are high. We are battling our own emotions and our own family members. Let me assure you that you are not alone here.

We are all grappling with overwhelming feelings and often struggle to show up for others as the best version of ourselves. Here are a few suggestions to manage conflict in your family.

- Be intentional about acknowledging your feelings. (FYI 'fine' is not a feeling.) Get as granular as possible. For example, are you angry or would disappointment or frustration be a more accurate emotional label? **Name it to Tame it.**
- **Ask for what you need.** Allow yourself and family members to feel comfortable to ask for what they need to manage their emotions...maybe it's time alone, maybe it's a conversation, maybe it's a milkshake.
- Parents can **model** positive coping and self-care strategies. Consider your habits around nutrition, exercise, sleep, and screens. Trust me – our kids are watching.
- Provide **structure** within the home that centers around **realistic expectations** for the moment. Parenting is challenging enough under optimal circumstances-**flexibility** is key to meeting the emotional and situational demands associated with parenting in a pandemic.
- Cultivate positive **communication** and **collaboration** between family members. Check out my '*Communication*' *Tip Sheet* for more on this. Our goal should be more high-quality interactions than low-quality ones in a single day.

There is overwhelming research to suggest that the most important and most valuable thing that parents can do for the wellbeing of their children is to be **warm** and **supportive**. We are their safe people. If we can model good coping, honestly label and express our emotions, and communicate and listen with empathy then we are helping to foster **resilience** in our children and contributing to their long-term wellbeing.



Whenever we have an intense emotional reaction to something, our body releases the stress hormone cortisol, which in turn triggers our fight or flight response. The chemical reaction caused by this normally lasts about 90 seconds, which gives our brain time to determine how best to react to what is happening. If someone jumps out and startles you, your body prepares itself to fight back or run away. If it turns out that it was just your child trying to be funny, then other parts of your brain will signal "all clear," the cortisol will dissipate, and you will calm down.

In practical terms, this means that when you and your child are having an intense emotional reaction to something, responding within the first 90 seconds is a bad idea. Doing so will likely trigger an escalation of emotions (theirs and yours), which will keep your stress response elevated. This results in an escalation of emotions, rather than a de-escalation. Not surprisingly, no one is well-served by this. Think of your brain as a snow globe that gets shaken as you become emotional. It takes about 90 seconds for the "snow" to settle and the storm to pass.