

After the Fight

Tips and Techniques for Repairing Your Relationship

OK, so you and your kid had a fight. It was loud, it was explosive, and you both said things you regret.

What happens next? The storm blew over, it's the next day or even a week later. Should you just let it go? Be happy the storm has passed?

I know that's really tempting, because nobody wants to revisit drama. But the truth is that healthy families address bad things that have happened. Unhealthy families pretend they never happened. And I know you want to be the parent who leads a healthy family with healthy habits.

OK, so how on earth do you go about revisiting what happened? When should you do it? How should you do it? And what should you say?

Principle #1

Goal

The purpose of this conversation is not to dredge up the past in an unproductive way, but rather to help each other understand, be understood, and to formulate a better plan for the future. You'll know you did it right when you both feel closer and more connected after the conversation.

Principle #2

Results

You cannot control how your kid is going to respond to this conversation. But these are the methods that I have found will lead to the best chances of getting the result you desire, which is to be more connected and more close and have a better plan for the future.

Principle #3

Permission

Always ask permission before engaging in a sensitive or difficult conversation.

It is a matter of respect to ask your child for permission before engaging in this conversation. Notice that you are not asking if they want to have the conversation, but rather when would be a good time to have it. You will also reassure them that they are not in trouble so that they are willing to have the conversation.

"Hey, I really wanted to talk to you about what happened Monday night. You're not in trouble, I just wanted to have the opportunity to talk it through. When is a good time for us to have that conversation?"

Now, some kids are "rip off the Band-Aid" types, and they're just going to want to talk about it ASAP and not have a cloud hanging over their heads. Other kids will say, "It's not a good time, I'm hungry, I'm stressed," and you'll say, "That's OK. When is a good time?"

If they say "never" you'll want to start from the beginning at a different time and place when they seem calm and happy. I know that you really don't want to ruin their good mood, but that is when it is the right time to have a difficult conversation.

Principle #4

What to Say

You're the adult in the room (yes, even with your adult kids), so you open the conversation and here's what you say:

"Hey, I've been having a lot of thoughts and feelings about what happened on Monday night and I'd like the opportunity to discuss it with you. I appreciate the fact that you're open to us having this conversation. I want you to know that you're not in trouble and I'm not angry at you. I just want us to understand each other better. Is that OK?"

Then you say, "I would like to tell you how I see it and how I feel, and you're not going to interrupt me, and then I'm going to give you the opportunity to explain how you see it and how you feel, and I'm not going to interrupt you. Is that OK?"

Keep asking permission at every step of the way. Then state how you felt in the conversation neutrally and unemotionally. Try to understate the issue instead of overstating it. A light touch is key.

Ideally you want to keep this to 1–3 sentences. Do not say the same thing over and over again. It's very onerous and annoying. Here's an example:

"I felt a little overwhelmed and confused when you said that I never do the grocery shopping, because I feel like I try my best to keep this house stocked with food, so I felt a little bit underappreciated and taken for granted." (Notice that that was one sentence.)

Then it's your child's opportunity to talk. Do not correct her, do not insert your own view. Just let her talk, then validate and say: "Wow, I can see how that was difficult and painful for you. I'm really sorry."

Now ask the question about the future: "Is there anything that I can do to help you feel better about this in the future?" If your child is mature and in the right frame of mind, she will then say to you, "Is there anything that I can do?" but don't expect her to say that, or tell her to say this — again, the point is to come away from the conversation feeling more close and more connected.

This conversation should take 5–10 minutes. It's short, it's positive. It's constructive and it's connective.

Good luck!