

Managing Conflict at Home and Running Away From Home

What is conflict and don't all families have it?

It's true that all families will face some kind of conflict at some point in their lives together. Conflict can take many forms: there may be an uneasy atmosphere; people might be shouting at each other; people might be deliberately avoiding each other. In severe cases of conflict, there may be psychological abuse, physical intimidation or violence. Conflict rises as a result of people disagreeing or wanting different things. However, this doesn't mean that both sides are always equally to blame: sometimes, for example in many cases of abuse, one side might be responsible for introducing the conflict into the home.

When does conflict become a problem?

Conflict can become a problem if it is not addressed, as it may get worse and worse. If the conflict is severe enough to be causing real stress to anyone involved, it has gone too far and needs to be addressed.

Sometimes conflict can be so severe that it causes some children to run away from home. This can be triggered by all sorts of stressful home situations, for example: a death in the family; violence or other abuse; parents getting divorced; alcohol or drug issues; pressure from friends; dropping out of school, and so on. Some children run away from home because they are ashamed of something and don't want to tell their family about it. For many children in the situations mentioned above, running away can feel like the only choice.

How can conflict be addressed so that it doesn't get worse?

It depends on the people and the specific situation, but some good general tips are to know your emotions and how to express them effectively. Understand what you are feeling and why you are feeling that way - you may find that it helps to write about your feelings. Don't be afraid to let people know that you're upset, but try to communicate this as clearly and calmly as possible. Do things that you find relaxing in order to help you calm down. If you don't want to address the person at home directly, talk to someone else about it, for example a friend.

It is important that both sides listen to each other's concerns. If you find that the person you're talking to won't listen to you, it may be best to calmly remove yourself

from the conversation. Equally, if you find yourself getting too angry or upset to listen to the other person, it may also be a good idea to end the conversation until you feel ready to discuss it further.

In cases of serious conflict, especially where abuse might be involved, it is a good idea to get help from outside of your family and friends. For example, a school counselor or teacher would be able to alert the appropriate authorities about what is going on. You can also call Childline on 0800 1111 for free and confidential advice.

But I don't want to get anyone in trouble. Is running away such a bad idea?

Yes. Although it might seem like a tempting option, and indeed sometimes the only option, running away leads to a great many serious problems. Young people who run away are often faced with problems like not having anywhere to sleep, and not having any food, drink, or money. Because of this, as many as 1 in 8 young people who have run away get involved in crime to help them survive. They may also end up consuming alcohol or other drugs in order to cope with the pressures of living on the streets. The mental health of runaway children and young people can also be made significantly worse by ending up on the streets. Young runaways are also at a much greater risk of being sexually exploited and physically harmed.

Some young people who run away end up staying at another relative or friend's house. This may be fine for a short amount of time, but in most cases it doesn't solve the problem in the long term.

The best thing to do if you are worried about your own family situation or a friend's family situation is to ring a helpline and get some advice. The Runaway Helpline is available to call or text 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, on 116 000. Childline is available on 0800 1111, also 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If the situation is serious, you are in danger or someone is deliberately and seriously hurting you, phone the police (999).