

10 Sure Steps to Resolve Family Feuds

World magazine reports, “Few family feuds could have implications more dire than the dispute between two elderly Mexican brothers believed to be the last two native speakers of the ancient Zoque language. Mexican linguists say if the two 70-year-old brothers don’t bury the hatchet soon and talk to each other, the pre-Columbian indigenous language could become lost forever. As one last desperate measure, linguists studying the Zoque language plan on recording the two men telling stories separately.”

It’s terrible to lose an ancient language. It’s worse to lose a family relationship. All of us have had or will have a falling-out with family, and it’s important to resolve that feud, at least on our end, as quickly as possible. Here are 10 steps to resolve family feuds.

1. Listen twice as much as you talk.

God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a reason. Listening says, “I respect you.” Listening means you are not imposing your viewpoint on others. Listening reduces tension. Family communication is dead in the water without it.

2. Bring the parties together and create a covenant.

If you can possibly sit down together and talk, then do so. Don’t pretend there’s no problem, and don’t expect an instant compromise, but instead work out an agreement that you can sign in ink rather than carve out in blood. A covenant should:

- Declare the intention of reconciliation.
- Outline expectations.
- Define what is acceptable.
- Always move at least a step or two forward.

- Include a time to get back together.

3. Begin with a simple “cessation of hostilities.”

Sometimes it's enough to promise to back down. Sometimes all anyone can do is to walk away. If that's all either of you can do, then that's a great start. The next time you meet you can agree to take another step forward. Reconciliation is seldom all or nothing. Because, given that kind of choice, most people opt for nothing.

4. Remember the only person you can control is you.

Avoid catering to anyone's need to be “right” (including yours). The only person you can change or control is you. That means owning the responsibility to do the right thing—unilaterally if necessary. If the conflict is between two other family members, then tell both sides of the conflict the same thing, namely: “The only behavior you are responsible for is your own.”

5. Take the stance of a servant.

This is another opportunity for servant leadership, and it's a posture that teaches children and other family members by example. Serve the family member you're upset with, bring them a cup of hot tea or a glass of cold lemonade. Set the trajectory toward love in action. Jesus put it this way, “But don't act like them. If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others” (Matt. 20:26).

6. Turn it over to God.

Some things are beyond our capacity to fix. That doesn't have to be the end of hope. Prayer is always an option. Taking time to acknowledge our personal inadequacy and our need for divine help can tip the balance in favor of hope.

7. Appoint an arbitrator.

If the people who are at each other's throats are your children or other family members, the arbitrator might be you. If you're embroiled in the conflict personally, ask everyone's favorite relative.

8. Talk directly to the parties involved.

This is true when the conflict involves you and when it's between other family members. Never act or advise based on second-hand information.

9. Always be the first to apologize.

This is true even if you're not the only one who's wrong. Set the standard that says, "I value peace, and I'm sometimes willing to sacrifice my need to be right for it." Being right is not always the most important in the great scheme of things.

10. Never take sides.

When you observe a conflict, always be on the side of reconciliation. Taking sides ramps up defensiveness and promotes a win-lose scenario that quickly turns to lose-lose.

How do you best resolve family conflict? {eoa}

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