

Teaching Your Kids to Resolve Conflict With Integrity

In our 15 years of marriage, my wife and I have worked hard to communicate and resolve conflict well. We've learned the importance of good communication, and why we need to make sure we don't allow unresolved conflict to become an obstacle in our marriage. We've also learned to apply the same conflict resolution principles in parenting as we raise our four boys. As you know, children provide many opportunities to resolve conflict with their siblings as well as with us as parents.

For example, in the past 24 hours, I can give you several examples of when we've had to coach our boys in how to resolve conflicts. What do you do when one calls the other an "idiot"? Or, how do you handle it when your 12-year-old throws his paddle down on the ground because he can't beat his old man in ping-pong? And maybe the one that frustrates me the most: What do you do when your children disrespect your wife? The No. 1 rule in our house is, "Thou shalt respect thy Momma!"

Here are the six ways we're intentionally parenting our boys when it comes to ways to resolve conflict.

1. Learn to say you're sorry.

Marriage and parenting provide plenty of opportunities to hurt and offend one another. We're trying to teach our boys to own their part and recognize when they've done something wrong. Instead of pointing the finger and blaming the other, we want our boys to acknowledge when they've done something wrong.

2. Don't just say you're sorry. Ask for forgiveness.

It doesn't end with just saying you're sorry. Asking for forgiveness requires a level of humility because you're forced to recognize that you've done something wrong and you ought to

demonstrate humility with the ones you've wronged.

A few years ago, I watched one of our boys kick one of his brothers between the legs. He thought he was getting away with it, but to his chagrin, I watched the whole thing go down. I asked him to not only apologize but to ask for forgiveness from his brother. "I'm sorry for whatever I did" does not work. Rather, we want our boys to apologize and ask for forgiveness for the specific wrongs they've done.

3. Be honest and always tell the truth.

This principle should be simple enough, but at their core, our children will lie, cheat and steal. They'll do whatever they need to do to get away with something, hide it and blame their brothers instead of admitting their wrongs. Practically, this means that we ask our kids how they feel when someone else lies to them. Or, we challenge them to always tell "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." My wife and I have prayed their whole lives that our boys would become men who don't hide or lie. Conflict can never be fully resolved if it's based on lies or half-truths.

4. Remember who you're fighting with.

My aunt used to tell me to treat my brother well because he's all I will ever have. I didn't understand what she meant at the time, but as I watch my boys grow up, I now know what she meant. Someday my wife and I will be gone, but my boys will always have one another, so they should treat them with respect, kindness, and care.

5. Be kind. Practice the Golden Rule.

Treat others as you would want to be treated. If you want to be kicked by your brothers and made fun of by them, then by all means, you go ahead and do the same. But, the better way is to recognize that we should treat others like we want to be treated.

6. Model healthy conflict resolution when you mess up.

There are times when I tell my kids to “shut up,” and times when I raise my voice and yell. In those moments, I practice what I preach. I apologize to them and ask for their forgiveness. The same thing happens when Kristen and I don’t communicate or conflict well. Sometimes good conflict resolution is caught instead of taught.

Your role as a parent is to help guide your children. They’re not going to learn good conflict resolution skills on their own. Ask good questions to help them figure out what they did wrong and remind them of the importance of good conflict resolution.

What are you doing to teach your kids how to resolve conflict?
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