



Criminal Behavior and Its Impact on the Family

When a person becomes involved in the criminal justice system, it's a family experience. Being separated can be hard, especially if the person is incarcerated. The return to the family is also difficult. As families learn to live without substances and criminal behaviors, they must also change how the entire family functions.

While the person is in the criminal justice system, family members may have suffered the pain of separation, loss of income, health issues, a changed living situation, behavior changes in children, and often a sense of shame about having an offender in the family. Resources gained through criminal activity may have been lost too. With all these stressors, family conflict and anger often flare up when the person returns home.

As the offender re-integrates back into the family, there will be many challenges and stressors for everyone, perhaps leading to tensions and "acting out" within the family. Managing conflict is crucial to positive family health.

Check the current stressors in your family:

- Loss of income
- More health problems
- Problems determining new roles in the family
- With less income, the family had to move to a new home (or move in with others)
- Employment issues
- Behavior change in children, or "acting out"
- Children cared for by grandparents or in foster care
- Transportation problems
- Guilt or shame over current family situations
- Other stressors:

Ways to Manage Family Conflict

1. Think back to conflicts you've had with family members in the past. What were they?

2. What triggers have started these conflicts in the past?

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Use these tips to manage family conflict:

1. Whatever the conflict, each family member can ask, “What is my own part in this problem?” and take responsibility for it.
2. Set boundaries about how you talk about issues that provoke conflict.
3. Listen to each other fully. In conflict, people often “talk around” each other without listening.
4. Slow down the conversation. Think about what you say before you say it. Remember, words can hurt!
5. Show respect: remember that there’s more to each of us than our behavior at a given time. We are all worthy of respect.
6. Accept and understand the other person’s point of view, even if you don’t agree with it. People can experience the same thing differently.
7. Each family member must ask: Am I satisfied with how I’m interacting with others? If not, what can I do about it?
8. Collaborate, rather than confront. Discuss and understand the other person’s view.
9. Be willing to negotiate. Don’t let little problems become big problems!
10. Don’t humiliate someone to prove a point.

Which of these do you think will work for your family?

Following these tips can help prevent needless conflict, and help keep healthy differences of opinion from escalating into anger. Work with your counselor during family conjoint sessions to improve these skills.

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