

**When our children were younger, my husband and I would never argue in front of them. Now that they are in high school, is it still important to hide our disagreements?**

Wow! I am impressed that you and your husband have had that much self-control. While I don't actively advocate that parents argue in front of their adolescents, dismissing or delaying disagreements can also be potentially detrimental to emotional development. In fact, it may actually be healthy for teens to see their mom and dad engage in the occasional dispute.

Obviously, it is never acceptable to participate in over-the-top name-calling, or knock-down, drag-out fights. Heated discussion of appropriate intensity and length are, however, growth-promoting opportunities for parents of teens. Kids should know that any two people who spend a significant amount of time together will experience conflict. It is how one handles the disagreement that differentiates acceptable arguing from harmful hollering.

First, be aware of what you are arguing about and where you argue. While, many teens are mature beyond their years, certain topics should be avoided. Conflicts regarding intimacy, money, addiction or how to raise the children should only occur in private. What parents argue about is almost as important as how they argue.

When arguments do emerge, model appropriate communication strategies and resolution skills. Keep voices low as yelling escalates the situation. Demonstrate listening by engaging in appropriate turn-taking exchanges. Respond with clarifying statements that convey understanding.

Also avoid asking your son or daughter to give an opinion. Teens will view this as taking sides, creating internal turmoil as they support one particular parent.

Lastly, end your arguments properly. Keep discussions short and resolve the conflict. Sometimes this will mean agreeing to disagree. Later, talk to your teenager about the situation and assure him that his parents are happy and that the occasional minor dispute is part of a healthy relationship.

Teens that see their parents engage in appropriate communication, which includes arguing, learn how to form healthy relationships, relieve stress and solve problems. In fact, it is a parent's job to model and teach their kids how to "let off steam" and resolve disagreements. If, on the other hand, the household atmosphere is terribly turbulent, seek the assistance of an outside professional. Teens that see their parents engage in high frequency fighting may experience depression, anxiety, and long-lasting emotional scars.