

Negotiation

In healthy relationships, negotiation is a skill that allows for each person to be heard and have his/her needs taken into account. Through negotiation, we learn to see issues from several points of view and it enables us to work as a team towards agreed upon rules and choices. Negotiation is a great tool for building trust, intimacy, safety and interdependence.

Negotiation is also an art. There are several things that need to be taken into account for negotiation to feel successful. This module is designed to help you understand areas with which you, as a family, may struggle. Some skills that will be addressed you already may do naturally, some you may have learned recently in therapy and some will be entirely new. Each family has their own style of negotiating, but the principles of successful negotiating tend to be consistent.

The last part of this module includes several case studies that you can read and decide how you would negotiate the outcome. At times it is helpful for us to negotiate an issue that is outside of ourselves to get a feel for it, before jumping into our own heated and intense emotional issues.

One huge block to achieving successful negotiation skills is that we have a hard time separating from intense emotions and stepping outside of ourselves enough to understand and consider everyone's point of view. We shut down because we are afraid that if we give a little, or open ourselves up we might get taken advantage of, or have something taken away from us. We will begin by looking at some of requirements of successful negotiation as well as some of the stumbling blocks to successful negotiation.

Successful Negotiation Musts:

1. Ask yourself what you are willing to sacrifice and put it "on the table".
2. Make your own offer, do not offer for someone else or tell them what their offer should be.
3. Use responsible language in your offers, thoughts and feelings.
4. Explain on an emotional level how you see the situation and why you are having difficulties wanting to sacrifice.
5. Negotiation is not deciding whose side is better or more right, but coming to an agreement somewhere in the middle.

Stumbling Blocks to Successful Negotiation:

Power Plays: Power plays tend to happen when we are feeling scared or vulnerable. We feel threatened and so our impulse is to want to control the situation or person. A power play is anything that is said or done that is used to create an unequal ground, or to place someone in an inappropriate power position. Power plays are unhealthy because they destroy safety and trust.

Example: I leave the room in the middle of a negotiation because I'm not getting what I want and refuse to come back. No one gets what they want and I have caused a feeling of

helplessness for everyone involved. I've taken all the power for whether or not the negotiation will even take place.

Power struggles: If needed, please review the Three Levels of Communication module. Power struggles are based on the need for someone to be right and someone to be wrong. You know that you are caught in a power struggle because the conversation tends to go in circles and escalates. Issues seem to become confusing and nothing real is being resolved. What tends to happen to end a power struggle is someone is able to assert his/her power enough that the other person is left with very few, if any, choices. Depth charges tend to dominate these kinds of conversations, and very little understanding of the emotional issue, which is the problem, is considered. When negotiating, one of the most effective ways to get out of a power struggle is to begin talking on the second, or emotional level of communication.

Example: All parties involved get into a blaming cycle where each person is deemed more right or wrong based on past mistakes.

Lose/Lose or Win/Lose Orientations: We live in a very competitive society and we are often taught to win, and sometimes win at all costs. When our discussions and connections are about "winning" or being "right" instead of how can we work together in a way that all parties feel somewhat comfortable with what is going on, we create distance, defensiveness, inequality and shame in our interactions. Win/win needs to be the goal at the beginning of a negotiation. This may not always happen, but it can be the general feeling in a family that works at it. Win/ Win is more about process than content. People convinced of Win/Win solutions communicate differently than those holding onto a Lose/Lose or Win/Lose mentality.

Question: How would the process of negotiation be different in Win/Win goals as compared to Win/Lose and Lose/Lose goals?

Example: In a Win/Win orientation I want to make sure that everyone's feelings are understood and everyone has an idea of how those feelings are going to be considered and taken care of to some extent.

Manipulation: Manipulation undermines safe negotiation because it is not honest and only focuses on the person who is manipulating. Other people's feelings and needs are not being considered. Manipulation is another example of a Win/Lose situation. Manipulation will also reduce trust in any relationship. We manipulate for several reasons. Some common themes include: we only want it our way (selfishness), we don't trust that someone else will meet us half way, we are testing limits and boundaries, we are ashamed of our actions, or we are engaged in addictive patterns and have a need to hide.

Example: I offer part of the truth to seem trustworthy and withhold part so that I will get my way. I trick you into thinking that I am committed to being honest with you.

What to consider in family therapy:

Take some time in family therapy to explore if any of these dynamics come out in your family. Discuss why as a family you might fall into these patterns. Discuss how your family handles fear.

A Beginning Place

To begin the process of negotiation in your family, it is important to delineate what is negotiable and what is not negotiable. Every family has a different idea as to what is negotiable.

For your family, what would be a general rule that would help you decide whether something is negotiable or not negotiable?

Here at New Haven, as a family, you will have the opportunity to develop a 'Rules and Consequences' contract for when your daughter returns home. The contract making process is a process of negotiation. The Rules and Consequences Contract will be a part of your transition plan. For your family to be successful we want everyone to be on the same page and understand how to work through issues in a safe and connected way.

What to consider in family therapy:

As you set up this contract notice how the process is difficult. Discuss what stumbling blocks are coming up as you are trying to create the contract. How is everyone feeling as they are putting their ideas on the table?

Case Studies

For each case study consider the following questions:

1. How do each of you view what is going on for the people in the case study?
2. Who do you identify with emotionally-why?
3. Is this a negotiable or not negotiable issue for you as parents?
4. What options can each of you come up with that would take into account everyone's feelings and needs to some extent?
5. How would you approach the issue in order to negotiate?

Case Study #1:

It is a Wednesday night and Suzie wants to stay out until midnight with some friends that mom and dad have not met before. Usually curfew is at 10:00pm on weekdays and midnight on weekends. Suzie promises that she will be safe and that these people are really cool. Mom and dad don't think she should go out at all and suggest that she watches some TV or reads a book. Suzie gets mad and stomps off to her room screaming that no one understands and that mom and dad just don't want her to have any friends.

Case Study #2:

Suzie has met a new boy at school that she likes and wants to go out with him. He's asked her to the prom. He's a senior and she's a sophomore. Mom had met him briefly at the mall the week before when she and Suzie were shopping. Mom and dad are worried about typical prom night activities-especially after the dance. Suzie wants curfew to be suspended for the night because all the other kids don't have a curfew. Mom and dad are not comfortable with that because Suzie is only 15 years old and they don't know this boy very well. Suzie insists that he's a good boy and will not do anything "bad" with him and thinks that mom and dad are being over protective.

Case Study #3:

Suzie wants to throw a party for her friends at the house and wants mom and dad not to be there. She promises that there will be no drugs or alcohol. When mom and dad ask Suzie who she is inviting to the party, Suzie says she hasn't decided yet and wants whoever she asks to be able to come.

Case Study #4:

Suzie wants to go away for spring break. The friends she wants to go with mom and dad know pretty well and feel that in general they are good kids. They want to go to Fort Lauderdale, but mom and dad would prefer they picked a less "party town" atmosphere. Suzie gets upset and accuses her parents of not trusting her and not allowing her to be a "normal" teenager. Mom and dad reply that it is because they love her and don't want her to get hurt. Suzie doesn't understand how she can convince her parents that she will be OK.