

## When Relationships Get Messy

Many relationships get messy sooner or later and that's not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, sometimes people need a good fight or a clearing of the air in order to get a relationship back on track. A conflict doesn't mean the relationship has to come to an end. Remember: we often fight with the people we care about the most and with whom we share our greatest hopes.

But what do we do when relationships get messy?

Here are some ideas that might come in handy when things get hard:

1. **Take time to listen to each other.** This is not always easy. Each person should take some time to listen without interrupting, while the other person talks.
2. **Put yourself in the other person's shoes.** Everyone in a conflict has distinctly different views of a situation. In the thick of a fight, people are usually convinced they are absolutely right. Try to see why the other person sees things the way they do. Just your attempt to do so will help the other person see that you are trying.
3. **Look at what is true about what the other person is saying.** See if you can correct the situation. If you need to apologize, go ahead. It may feel horrible, but an apology can often help a relationship get back on the right track.
4. **Separate emotions from reality.** Everyone has emotions that surface intermittently. People often say things they don't mean when they are in the middle of an emotional upset. Allow time and space for people to feel their emotions before you try to work things out.
5. **Continue to appreciate and respect each other.** Even though it may be difficult, focus on the positive aspects of the relationship. If you model appreciation, the other person will often follow.
6. **Speak from your heart.** As you try to unravel the difficulty, keep focused on what you and the other person care about most: the goals of the project, each other, the community, etc.
7. **Don't give up your principles.** Don't sacrifice what you believe in just to make a relationship work. If you give up on your principles, you won't be effective and the relationship won't work anyway.
8. **Hang in there when things get hard.** You can take some breathing room, but try not to give up on the relationship altogether. When things are the toughest, there are important lessons to be learned. It's best to keep a relationship that you've invested your time and caring into.
9. **Last, and most important: You can act independently to improve any relationship.** Even if the other person or group of people is acting rotten, you can act in a way that is positive, respectful, constructive, and thoughtful. This may surprise people, and they may follow your lead.

Is all this easier said than done? Yes. Managing relationships may be hard, but it is not impossible. Think of yourself as an explorer, charting your course through the mysterious and murky waters of relationships. Treasure lies ahead!