

Personal Peace Principles

-  Conflict, emotions, and negotiation are a part of everyday life. It's how you choose to handle them that's important.
-  Deal with the minor disagreements before they grow into major disputes.
-  Never try to resolve a problem when people are very emotional. Walk away and cool off first.
-  When you're talking about something difficult or sensitive, a relaxed atmosphere helps. Find a time when things are calm and there aren't any distractions.
-  Every conversation has three parts: 1) What happened, who did what when, etc.; 2) Spoken and unspoken feelings – yours, theirs, and anyone else's involved (at their core, most difficult situations don't just involve feelings, they're about feelings); and 3) Your own internal talk about what's going on, whether you're handling it right, what the situation means to you, etc. (your internal talk affects how you respond to others and the situation, and how open you are to coming up with solutions).
-  Don't go into a discussion by blaming, accusing, denying, interrogating, moralizing, lecturing, threatening, or shaming.
-  Do go into a discussion with some thought about what you want and why. What's your ideal solution? What would be a realistic solution? What would you be willing to accept?
-  Do remember that there's only one person you have complete control over: YOU. Make sure you start from an honest place. Despite what we sometimes pretend, we go into many conversations trying to prove a point (or ourselves right), to give someone a piece of our mind, or to get them to do something we want. Instead...
-  Go into the discussion with an open attitude, one based on truly seeking FIRST to listen and understand the other's perspective. Put yourself in their shoes. THEN talk about your point of view. If you give someone a chance to talk first, and they feel listened to, they are far more willing to listen to you.
-  Separate the people from the problem. Be soft on the people, hard on the problem. Show empathy and respect, even while you disagree with them. Particularly in a family, the relationship is more important than the substance of the conflict.
-  Focus on interests, not positions. Don't stay stuck on the surface, on each other's "bottom line." Instead, get to the core of the problem: explore perspectives and needs. Ask "why?" and "why not?"
-  When it's your turn to talk, use description. Describe your purpose rather than state your case. Describe your feelings: "I'm anxious about bringing this up, but at the same time, it's important to me that we talk about it." Use a three-part message structure: 1) I feel (describe your feelings)... 2) when (describe behavior or what happened)... 3) because (why it upsets you; the effects).
-  Once everyone has aired their views and feelings, move into inventing options for mutual gain. Try to come up with a number of creative, cooperative solutions. Quantity and variety count here, not quality; you can make a final decision later.
-  When you come to making a final decision, try to use objective criteria to evaluate the options you've brainstormed. Be open to reason, and to ways other people in similar situations might have resolved the problem. Find a point of agreement to build on rather than focusing on points of disagreement. If you've decided on some of your preferences, don't present one option as "the truth." Try to put choices on the table: "I can do this or I can do that. It's up to you to tell me which you'd prefer." Share why you've chosen certain preferences. Leave room for change and for good feelings to emerge.
-  Sum up what has been agreed to so that everyone is clear on the decision. You may even want to write it down.
-  If, despite your best efforts, you can't seem to resolve a critical issue, consider involving an intermediary like a mediator.