

# MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

## PARENTING DISAGREEMENTS DURING COVID

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
SEPTEMBER 2020 MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT

Close quarters, lack of clear guidance, constant changes and children always underfoot have left many parents scrambling to navigate the complicated process of agreeing on rules. You might disagree about contact with friends, playing sports or the type of school instruction to pick for the fall. Bridging this divide might feel especially frustrating and consuming right now. Given the current state of the world, everything feels more emotionally charged. However, parents most likely have the tools and skills to handle this! The same skills used to co-parent and work through disagreements before the pandemic still apply. You just need to remember how to use them.

### Tips

- ❖ **Plan and prepare** – Find a neutral, calm time to talk through disagreements on rules before your child is in front of you. Try to avoid reacting in the moment to situations and each other by planning. Try picking a specific time for adults to discuss a topic and then set a time limit on how long you will discuss. After your children are in bed or first thing in the morning might work for you. You can even use a timer.
- ❖ **Work through your emotions first** – Sometimes you need to get feelings out before trying to address the issue itself. Don't be afraid to say, "I'm emotional about this because I'm really anxious." Talking through emotions in a separate conversation can help you understand where your partner is coming from (and vice versa). This will make planning easier and more productive. Acknowledge that your partner's feelings are valid and ask that they do the same for you. This is key to ensuring that you feel like you are working together and not against each other.
- ❖ **Separate relationship issues from parenting decisions** – Set clear boundaries around what is and is not out of bounds when you talk about parenting. For example, keep a conversation about the issue of safely meeting up with family members separate from feelings about the family members themselves.
- ❖ **You don't have to agree on everything** – Sometimes you will not be able to come to an agreement and that is okay, if you present a united front to your children. Especially now, it is not always possible to settle on a clear, right answer. Whatever you decide to go with, the most important thing is for the children to know that there's no getting around the rules. If you decide that your teenager can only meet up with friends outdoors, it should be clear that both parents stand behind that rule, even if privately one parent thinks it might not be necessary.
- ❖ **Keep the conversation open** – It is hard to be on the same page when you and your partner are both trying to absorb new information almost daily. Agree that you will check in on a weekly basis, or whenever a big change occurs, and adjust your rules accordingly. One way to do this is to keep a running list of concerns to address together. Your regular check-ins can also be a place to get on the same page about decisions one parent had to make in the moment.
- ❖ **It is not going to be perfect and that is okay** – Agree to cut each other some slack when things do not go as planned. Parenting is a work in progress. You take as many precautions as possible to keep yourselves and your children safe and then do your best. Remember the goal is not to be perfect but to do the best you can and let that be enough.