Family Conflicts and the Holidays

Many of us will be gathering with family and friends over the holidays. Sometimes, this may lead to friction and conflict. If you are afraid that family quarrels may derail the holiday season, these tips may help:

▶ Avoid hot button topics (such as politics or vaccination requirements). Politely decline to participate in conversations that you suspect will lead to disagreements.

▶ If someone’s behavior is upsetting you, explain why using “I” statements. For example: “I don’t like that nickname, and it hurts my feelings when you use it.”

▶ When you are in a bad patch with a family member, face it head on. Sit down with the other person and discuss any underlying conflicts. Put some work into keeping the lines of communication open. If you aren’t able to find common ground on certain topics, agree to disagree.

▶ Avoid passive-aggressive behavior, such as irritability, sarcasm, or talking behind someone’s back.

▶ A sincere apology is one of the simplest ways to defuse conflict. If you have made an error, own your mistake. If you were thoughtless or inappropriate, acknowledge that your behavior was out of line. Look for ways to improve communication and avoid disagreements in the future.

▶ If you are struggling to rein in your temper or avoid saying something you may later regret, put the conversation on hold until tempers have cooled.

▶ Ask a trusted family member for their thoughts on how to resolve a difficult or longstanding conflict. (It’s best to do this in a private setting.) Avoid drawing other people into the disagreement.

It takes two to resolve a conflict. If the other person is unwilling to talk, it’s best to give them some space. Step away from aggressive behavior or abusive language.

LifeMatters is available 24/7/365, even on holidays. If family conflict is causing you stress, we’re here to help.