

TURN ARGUMENTS INTO CONVERSATIONS

THE 30-DAY FAMILY COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME



ERIC CUTHBERT



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A note from the author

Parenting a teenager can sometimes feel as if every request becomes a negotiation and every negotiation becomes an argument. This programme was created for families who want practical help changing that pattern.

This edition has a deliberately focused purpose. It is a practical 30-day action programme for reducing conflict, improving communication and creating fairer family agreements.

The aim is not to remove parental responsibility or avoid necessary boundaries. It is to combine warmth, clarity and consistency so disagreements become safer, shorter and more constructive.

Eric Cuthbert
www.mynewfuture.org

Important

This book provides general educational information, not individual medical, psychological, safeguarding or legal advice. If anybody is in immediate danger, cannot be kept safe or may seriously harm themselves or somebody else, call 999 or obtain urgent professional help.

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The chapter titles and page numbers above are clickable. You can read the chapters first and then begin the plan, or start immediately and use the chapters as support.

Why the Same Arguments Keep Happening

The argument is usually a pattern

Families often believe they are arguing about a bedroom, homework, a phone or a curfew. The immediate subject matters, but the argument is usually powered by a repeated pattern. A parent feels ignored and increases pressure. The teenager feels controlled and resists. The parent interprets resistance as disrespect and pushes harder. Both people then defend themselves instead of solving the original problem.

The first aim of this programme is not to decide who is the difficult person. It is to notice the sequence. Patterns can be changed because each person can learn to interrupt their own part of the cycle.

Separate the subject from the pattern

Write down one recent disagreement in neutral language. Avoid labels such as lazy, selfish or impossible. Record what happened first, what was said next, when voices changed and how the argument ended. This turns a personal battle into a process you can examine together.

A useful opening is: 'We keep getting stuck in the same argument. I do not want either of us to win at the other's expense. Can we look at what happens and try a different approach?'

TRY THIS

For three days, notice one repeated conflict without trying to fix it immediately. Record the trigger, your first response, your teenager's response and what happened next.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'I think we are caught in a pattern. Let us pause and work on the pattern, not attack each other.'

YOUR NOTES

Recognising Your Family's Conflict Triggers

Triggers are often predictable

Arguments rarely appear from nowhere. Hunger, tiredness, rushing, embarrassment, feeling criticised, school pressure and a lack of privacy can all lower patience. The same request may receive a reasonable response at five o'clock and an explosive response at eleven o'clock.

Timing does not remove responsibility, but it affects the chance of success. Difficult conversations deserve better conditions than a shouted exchange while somebody is leaving the house.

Look for the need underneath

A parent may need reassurance that an agreement will be kept. A teenager may need autonomy, dignity or time to think. Naming both needs creates room for a solution. For example: 'I need to know you are safe, and you need some freedom. Let us find an arrangement that protects both.'

Do not use a trigger map as evidence against somebody. Its purpose is preparation, not blame.

TRY THIS

Create two lists headed 'Things that make conflict more likely' and 'Things that help us talk'. Compare lists during a calm moment.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'This matters, but now is a poor time. When would we both be able to give it ten calm minutes?'

YOUR NOTES

What to Do When Emotions Take Over

A pause is a skill, not a defeat

When either person feels threatened, listening narrows and the body prepares to fight, flee or shut down. Continuing to argue usually produces more words and less understanding. A planned pause protects the relationship and prevents an impulsive sentence becoming the next problem.

A pause must include a return time. Walking away without explanation can feel like rejection or punishment. Say when you will return, keep that promise and begin again more slowly.

The ninety-second reset

Stop speaking. Put both feet on the floor. Breathe out more slowly than you breathe in. Unclench your jaw and lower your shoulders. Name the emotion silently: anger, fear, shame or frustration. Decide on one sentence rather than a speech.

If there is immediate danger, violence, a weapon or a serious safeguarding concern, prioritise safety and obtain appropriate professional or emergency help. This programme is not a substitute for urgent support.

TRY THIS

Agree a family pause phrase such as 'Reset, then return'. Decide where each person can cool down and how long the pause will normally last.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'I care about this conversation too much to continue it badly. I will come back at seven-thirty and we will try again.'

YOUR NOTES

CHAPTER 4

Listening Without Immediately Correcting

Listening is not agreement

Parents sometimes fear that listening will be mistaken for permission. In reality, people are more able to hear a boundary after they believe their own view has been understood. Listening delays the answer; it does not surrender the decision.

Try to understand before explaining. Ask one question, listen to the complete response and reflect the main point in your own words. If you have misunderstood, allow your teenager to correct you.

Avoid the advice reflex

Advice can arrive before a teenager has finished describing the problem. Ask: 'Would you like me to listen, help you think it through or suggest an answer?' This small choice returns some control and often reduces defensiveness.

Do not turn a disclosure into a lecture. If a safety issue requires action, explain calmly what you need to do and why.

TRY THIS

Have one five-minute conversation in which your only tasks are to ask, listen and summarise. Do not correct details unless safety depends on them.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'Let me check I have understood. You felt I had already decided before I asked you. Is that right?'

YOUR NOTES

Speaking So Your Teenager Can Hear You

Use fewer words

Long explanations can sound like a closing argument. State the observation, the effect and the request. For example: 'You arrived forty minutes after the agreed time. I was worried because I could not reach you. Next time, send a message before the time changes.'

Deal with one issue at a time. Bringing in six previous mistakes makes repair feel impossible and invites an argument about history.

Describe, do not label

'Your plate has been on the floor since yesterday' describes a situation. 'You are disgusting and lazy' attacks identity. Description allows action; labels invite defence. Be firm about behaviour while protecting the person's dignity.

Choose a calm, ordinary tone. Volume can make a reasonable boundary sound like a threat.

TRY THIS

Rewrite one repeated criticism as a short observation, feeling and request. Practise saying it in under twenty seconds.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'When the agreement changes without a message, I worry. I need you to contact me before the agreed time.'

YOUR NOTES

Choosing Which Battles Really Matter

Use three categories

Place disagreements into three groups: safety and values; shared household responsibilities; and personal preference. Safety may require a firm boundary. Responsibilities require a fair agreement. Personal preferences often benefit from greater freedom.

Hair, music and clothing may feel important but usually belong to personal preference. Violence, dangerous driving and disappearing overnight without contact are safety issues. An untidy shared kitchen concerns responsibility; a teenager's private room may allow more negotiation.

Save influence for what matters

If everything becomes a major battle, the important messages disappear in the noise. Letting go of a low-risk preference is not weak parenting. It shows that freedom grows where safety permits.

TRY THIS

List your five most common disagreements and place each in one of the three categories. Choose one preference you can stop policing this week.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'I do not like that choice, but it is yours to make. My boundary is about safety, not taste.'

YOUR NOTES

Setting Calm and Reasonable Boundaries

A boundary explains what will happen

A threat tries to frighten somebody into obedience. A boundary states the requirement, the reason and the predictable response. It should be realistic enough to enforce without anger.

Good boundaries are discussed before the difficult moment whenever possible. They are specific: who, what, when and what happens if the agreement is not kept.

Consequences should teach

A useful consequence is connected, proportionate and time-limited. If trust was damaged by returning late, the next outing may need an earlier time or more contact. Removing every privilege for a month may create resentment without teaching the missing skill.

Follow through calmly. Repeated warnings that are never enforced teach everybody to wait for the parent to become exhausted.

TRY THIS

Choose one boundary and write it in four parts: the agreement, the reason, how success will be recognised and the consequence if it is broken.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'You may disagree with the rule. The rule remains, and I will explain the safety reason behind it.'

YOUR NOTES

The Win-Win Problem-Solving Method

Winning means solving the shared problem

Win-win does not mean everybody receives exactly what they first demanded. It means both people's important needs are considered and the solution protects the relationship as well as the practical outcome.

Use six steps: define the problem without blame; hear each person's view; name the needs underneath; generate several options; choose a trial solution; and set a review date.

Test rather than argue

A trial agreement lowers the pressure. Instead of debating whether an idea will work forever, test it for seven days and review the evidence. Ask what worked, what did not and what needs adjusting.

Write the agreement in plain language. Memory becomes unreliable when the result is inconvenient.

TRY THIS

Use the six steps on a low-stakes disagreement first. Agree a seven-day experiment and a ten-minute review meeting.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'My need is reassurance about safety. Your need is more independence. What options could respect both?'

YOUR NOTES

Repairing the Relationship After an Argument

Repair matters more than perfection

Every family handles some moments badly. Repair teaches that mistakes do not have to become permanent distance. It also models the accountability parents want teenagers to develop.

A useful apology names the action and its effect without adding 'but you made me'. It can still be followed by a separate conversation about the teenager's behaviour.

Reopen the practical issue

Repair is not pretending the disagreement never happened. First restore enough safety to talk. Then return to the original problem with fewer words and a clearer aim.

Small acts count: a cup of tea, a lift, a text saying 'I love you; we will sort this out', or sitting nearby without forcing immediate conversation.

TRY THIS

Make one repair within twenty-four hours. Say what you regret, what you will do differently and when you would like to revisit the issue.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'I was right to raise the issue, but I was wrong to shout and call you a name. I am sorry. I want to try again calmly.'

YOUR NOTES

Creating a Family Agreement

Make expectations visible

Unspoken expectations create arguments because each person believes the rule was obvious. A short written agreement reduces repeated reminders and provides a neutral reference point.

Keep the agreement focused. Include respectful communication, essential responsibilities, contact when plans change, privacy, shared spaces and how pauses will work. Avoid filling it with every parental preference.

Fair does not always mean identical

Different ages and circumstances may require different arrangements. Explain the reason for differences. Teenagers are more likely to accept a decision they consider procedurally fair, even when they dislike the outcome.

Review the agreement monthly. Trust and freedom should be capable of growing when responsibility is demonstrated.

TRY THIS

Hold a twenty-minute family meeting. Agree no more than five points and set a review date. Everybody should receive a copy.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'This agreement is not about controlling every detail. It is about making our shared expectations clear and fair.'

YOUR NOTES

The 30-Day Family Communication Plan

Small actions create credible change

Trying to transform the whole family in one weekend usually creates disappointment. The 30-day plan introduces one manageable action at a time. Some days require a conversation; others involve observation, practice or repair.

Do not demand that your teenager participates in every exercise. A parent changing their own response can alter the pattern and create an invitation rather than another instruction.

Measure progress realistically

Success does not mean no disagreement. Look for arguments that begin less often, end sooner, contain fewer personal attacks and are repaired more quickly. Notice ordinary positive contact as well as conflict.

If a day goes badly, do not restart the month. Record what happened and continue with the next action.

TRY THIS

Choose a start date and write it on the plan. Tell your family you are practising calmer communication, including changes to your own behaviour.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'For the next month I am working on how I listen, speak and handle conflict. I will not get it perfect, but I will keep practising.'

YOUR NOTES

Conversation Starters and Progress Checks

Open the door without forcing it

Good conversation starters are invitations, not disguised interrogations. They are often more successful during a walk, car journey or shared task because eye contact is less intense.

Try questions such as: 'What has taken the most energy this week?', 'What do adults misunderstand about being your age?', 'Is there anything I could do that would make home feel calmer?' or 'Would you like help, ideas or just company?'

Review without scoring each other

At the end of the programme, discuss what changed and choose two habits to keep. Do not use the review to list everything your teenager still does wrong. Begin with your own learning and invite their view.

Some families will need specialist help. Persistent fear, violence, coercive control, serious mental-health concerns or an inability to keep somebody safe require appropriate professional support. Seeking help is responsible, not a failure.

TRY THIS

Complete the final progress check separately, then compare only the points each person is comfortable sharing. Choose a date to review again in one month.

WORDS YOU COULD USE

'What should we keep doing, what should we stop doing and what should we try next?'

YOUR NOTES

THE COMPLETE PLAN

Your 30-Day Family Communication Plan

1	Observe one repeated argument without trying to assign blame.	[]
2	Write the sequence: trigger, response, escalation and ending.	[]
3	Notice the time, tiredness, hunger or pressure surrounding conflict.	[]
4	Ask one curious question instead of making an assumption.	[]
5	Have five minutes of ordinary positive contact with no advice.	[]
6	Choose and agree a family pause phrase.	[]

Days 7-12

7	Review week one: what made conversations easier?	[]
8	Practise the ninety-second reset before responding.	[]
9	Replace one label with a neutral description of behaviour.	[]
10	Ask: listen, help me think, or suggest an answer?	[]
11	Summarise your teenager's point before giving your own.	[]
12	Shorten one repeated lecture to a twenty-second request.	[]

Days 13-18

13	Postpone one important conversation to a better time.	[]
14	Review week two and acknowledge one improvement.	[]
15	Sort common disputes into safety, responsibility or preference.	[]
16	Let go of one low-risk personal preference.	[]
17	Write one boundary with a clear reason and consequence.	[]
18	Check that the consequence is related and proportionate.	[]

Days 19-24

19	Use the six-step win-win method on a small problem.	[]
20	Begin a seven-day trial agreement.	[]
21	Review week three without changing the agreement mid-argument.	[]
22	Make a repair for one thing you handled badly.	[]
23	Notice and mention something your teenager did responsibly.	[]
24	Hold a twenty-minute family meeting.	[]

Days 25-30

25	Draft no more than five points for a family agreement.	[]
26	Ask what would make one existing rule feel fairer.	[]
27	Review the seven-day trial and adjust it using evidence.	[]
28	Spend time together without discussing performance or problems.	[]
29	Complete the progress check and choose two habits to keep.	[]
30	Hold a final review: keep, stop and try next.	[]

Conflict Pattern Worksheet

What happened immediately before the disagreement?

What did I say or do first?

What did my teenager say or do next?

What need or fear may have been underneath each response?

At what point could I have interrupted the pattern?

What will I try next time?

Win-Win Problem-Solving Sheet

1. Define the shared problem

Describe the situation without labels or blame.

2. Hear both views

What does each person believe is happening?

3. Name the important needs

Safety, freedom, trust, privacy, respect, time or reassurance?

4. Generate options

List ideas before judging them.

5. Choose a trial

What will each person do, and for how long?

6. Review

What date and time will you discuss how it worked?

Our Family Agreement

Keep this agreement short, clear and open to review.
Focus on safety, respect and shared responsibility
rather than personal preferences.

Review date: _____

Signed: _____

FINAL REVIEW

30-Day Progress Check

Arguments begin less often.	[]	[]	[]
Arguments end sooner.	[]	[]	[]
We use fewer personal attacks.	[]	[]	[]
We pause and return more reliably.	[]	[]	[]
I listen before correcting.	[]	[]	[]
Requests are shorter and clearer.	[]	[]	[]
Boundaries feel more predictable.	[]	[]	[]
Repairs happen more quickly.	[]	[]	[]
There is more ordinary positive contact.	[]	[]	[]

The two habits we will keep:

1. _____

2. _____

Our next review date:

Your Next Step

You have now completed a practical programme designed to make disagreements safer, shorter and more constructive. If you or a young person in your family would benefit from further encouragement, My New Future offers simple AI-powered services that begin with a free personalised overview.

LIFE COACHING

Build confidence, improve motivation, make clearer decisions and create realistic personal goals.

Visit mynewfuture.org/life-coach/

YOUNG DRAGONS

Young Dragons helps people aged 16 to 24 explore business and side-hustle ideas, recognise their skills and create a practical first-income plan.

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About My New Future

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The aim is to provide practical tools, free educational resources and straightforward guidance that can help individuals, families, businesses, charities and community organisations explore new possibilities and make informed decisions.

Visit www.mynewfuture.org to discover the latest resources and services.

A final reminder

A calmer family is not one that never disagrees. It is one that can disagree without destroying trust, repair mistakes and keep learning together.