



SUPERHERO IRL

HEROIC JOURNEY AT HOME

Managing Family Conflicts

The ongoing pandemic is stressful for everyone and affects people all over the world. The pandemic has led to painful losses, including losing loved ones, as well as financial losses, and losses of in-person-support and resources. Being stuck inside the house can lead to its own set of problems, such as increased frustrations, increased conflicts, and in some cases, increased risk for violence and abuse.

In Star Wars, Star Trek, The Avengers, Harry Potter, Supernatural, and Justice League — in all these pop culture stories — we see multiple examples of characters who have to work together despite having conflicts and disagreements with one another. For example, when Avengers (a group of superheroes which includes Captain America, Black Panther, Iron Man, Black Widow, Thor, and the Hulk) are all confined together during an invasion, they begin fighting about how to solve the problem that they are facing. Each member of the group believes that they have the right solution; as they are all confined to one space, tensions run high, and the Avengers fight with one another.

A similar situation occurs in Harry Potter, when the leading character, Harry, is traveling around the world with his two best friends, Ron and Hermione. They are working to destroy evil artifacts and take down an evil wizard, Lord Voldemort. As the three travel together and spend many weeks camping out in close quarters, they begin to fight with one another. Does this feel like your home right now?

Even closely knit societies, such as Themyscira, the home of Wonder Woman, and Wakanda, the home to Black Panther, are not without conflicts. Family misunderstandings, differences of opinions, and the differences between tradition and adaptability all lead to additional conflicts in these otherwise peaceful lands.

Conflicts within family members and societies that cohabitate with one another are common, and sometimes unavoidable, what are some of the ways that we can keep such conflicts to a minimum -- and how can we reduce conflicts when they arise?

Here are ten strategies for managing conflict and supporting yourself and your family during the pandemic quarantine:

1. Mindfulness.

You have probably heard this term thrown around quite a bit. Mindfulness basically refers to paying attention to how you *feel* so that you can give yourself what you *need*. To practice mindfulness, you can take a moment just to check in with yourself to see how you are feeling. Are you hungry? Angry? Overwhelmed? Tired? Frustrated? Lonely?

Is there anything you need right now, such as food, rest, sleep, a moment to yourself, a hug, or sometime to decompress?

See if you can take some time for yourself to notice how you're feeling and what you need at least three times/day. It might take only a few seconds to do but it can make a world of a difference. You might notice how tense, tired, or overwhelmed you are; you might notice that you've been holding your breath, or that you have been feeling irritable or angry.

See if there's anything you need, and take at least a minute to give it to yourself. You deserve it, and you have earned it.

2. Being gentle with yourself.

This means giving yourself the support that you need to get through a tough time. It is okay if you don't finish all the dishes or all your work. We are living through a pandemic right now. This is not normal, and hence, it would be unfair to expect that you would function the way that you normally do. Take a breath and allow yourself to rest.

Take an hour, or even a day to yourself. Sometimes doing so is an investment into recharging our own battery and rebuilding ourselves, so that we can have more strength and energy to show up for our responsibilities the following day.

3. Alone time.

This might be challenging if you are living with many family members, especially if all of them expect things from you. It is okay for you to step away to another room, or a bathroom and take a few minutes to yourself to breathe. This is your time. You are absolutely allowed to take it any time you need.

4. Time out during arguments.

If arguments ensue, it is okay to take a time out, to step away from the argument, so that all parties involved have a chance to cool off. The most important thing in a time out is to specify that you are taking a time out and for how long. For example, stating “I am going to step away for 15 minutes to cool off and then I will come back and we can both continue this conversation once we both feel calmer.”

The reason this is important is that sometimes when everyone is angry and frustrated, they can do or say things they don't mean or later come to regret. Stepping away allows everyone to process what they are going through and to think about what they would like to express to the other person. Communicating about the time out duration allows people to know that the time out is not permanent, and that they will still get a chance to talk about the current situation. Without such communication, the person who is left will think that they are being abandoned and ignored, which can actually exacerbate the conflict.

5. Engaging the senses.

When feeling overwhelmed, angry, or overly anxious (e.g., when having a panic attack), see if you can engage your senses. One way of doing that is to hold an ice cube in your hands. Feeling the cool temperature of ice in your hands can allow you focus on it, allowing your body to unwind from a stressful situation. Similarly, holding a hot cup of tea on your hands, smelling a candle, or listening to music can also help to reduce your distress over time.

6. Socialization.

During the time of physical distancing, it is important to keep in touch with loved ones who might live far away, perhaps scheduling virtual dinners or watching TV shows together. Similarly, engaging in cooperative activities with the members of your household can also build more trust and cohesion between you and others. Some examples of cooperative behaviors include cooking together, watching TV shows together, or playing games together.

7. Movement!

This is one of the most important self-care activities you can engage in. You don't have to go to the gym to exercise. You can get creative with this. Put on your favorite song and dance around the house, or bounce while sitting, dance while sweeping or doing the dishes, dance around in the shower (carefully!). Adding movement, especially dancing or bouncing to your day can boost mood and can release a number of feel good chemicals into your body, such as dopamine and endorphins. Shimmy to the left. Shimmy to the right. And dance!

8. Productivity.

Staying productive and completing tasks on your to-do list can also lead to you feeling empowered. Completing tasks leads to a boost of dopamine, a feel-good chemical and higher self-esteem.

9. Laughter.

See if you can take some time to purposely watch funny TV shows or visit funny websites, or search for the latest Autocorrect Fails. Laughter boosts endorphins and improves our mood. If you can do this with your family, the experience of shared laughter can increase family bonding.

10. Therapy.

If you are struggling, you can reach out to a mental health provider. Many therapists are seeing clients over the phone or video therapy (Telehealth) now. To find a psychologist in the United States, visit www.PsychologyToday.com.

If at any point you are feeling frustrated or overwhelmed, you can text HELLO to the free crisis text line: 741741. Counselors are available 24/7 and it's free and confidential.

If you are going through domestic violence, please reach out for help: call 1-800-799-7233 or text "Hello" to 22522

To find support for LGBTQ Youth: Call the Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386 or text "Hello" to 687-687

Founded in 2013, SuperheroIRL is a project of Pop Culture Hero Coalition, the first 501c-3 non-profit to use relatable stories from TV, comics, and film, to develop tools for living, including conflict resolution, resilience, empathy, and other crucial mental health skills.

Created by pop-culture-fluent clinical psychologists and educators, our work is in schools, comic cons, children's hospitals – and homes in the age of COVID-19.

www.PopCultureHero.org

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