

# Using Movies to Talk to Teens

This e-course shares ways to use movies to facilitate conversations with teens. Some of those conversations will bring up pretty touchy subjects. While we all might hope to discuss issues with our family in a manner that doesn't result in arguments or tempers, arguments WILL happen in our families eventually. This week, we'll look at the skill of turning arguments into healthy conversations.

At the heart of a healthy argument is clear communication. At the heart of a stormy fight is usually emotion. Healthy communication happens when we can air the emotion without hurting the one who hurt us, reading the other person's mind, or laying blame. One of the best ways to do that is using "WWWF" statements: what happened, where or when, and how it made us *feel*.

## WWWF

WWWF statements are one of the best ways to get at the heart of a conflict without escalating a fight. Imagine you have made plans with your friend to go out to a movie three separate times, and your friend has canceled at the last minute every time. These last minute cancellations have cost you serious time and effort and you are getting fed up. Rather than putting your friend down ("You're so irresponsible; you don't care!"); letting the argument escalate ("We're never making plans again!"); giving her the silent treatment and never addressing the problem; or assuming the worst ("She must just not like me"); voice your feelings about the specific situation and give your friend the opportunity to respond. A WWWF statement in this instance might be, "We have made plans to go to a movie three times, and last night, when you called to cancel for the third time, I felt really hurt and frustrated. I bent over backwards to make that time work with our family schedule and I felt unappreciated for the effort I put into it."

By not blaming your friend, reading into her motives, or calling her names, you avoid putting her on the defensive. By addressing the issue in a reasonable tone, the discussion is less likely to escalate. And, by not avoiding the issue altogether, your hurt feelings are aired and have a chance to clear, instead of remaining bottled up and damaging the friendship. Hopefully, your friend apologizes for hurting you and gains a deeper appreciation for how her actions affect you.

Modeling this kind of healthy arguing is one of the best things you can do for your teen and your family. It might feel more natural to practice WWWF statements in your peer relationships first, but ultimately incorporating them into all of your family relationships will help improve communication on all levels.

Here's an example of how you can start coaching your child in WWWF statements. The next time your child storms into the kitchen exclaiming that her older sister is a jerk who ruins everything, jump in: "Honey, before we go any further, I'm going to help you restate that. You will never resolve anything if you call people names and if you can't articulate what it is that makes you mad."

Then coach her in WWWF statements until she is able to say to her sister, "Sarah, when you borrowed my sweater without asking, it made me feel disrespected, unimportant to you, and angry. I had plans to wear that sweater this weekend and now it is dirty and won't be clean in time for me to wear it." Hopefully, Sarah apologizes. If she doesn't...well, there are always lessons about forgiveness and letting go of our anger. At least she'll have learned an important life skill about healthy arguments.

SIDE NOTE: feeling statements don't include the word "like." "I feel like you were being a jerk" is NOT a feeling.