

Good Psychology

The High Cost Of Avoiding Difficult Conversations

(NAPSA)—If you've ever avoided having conversations about difficult topics—ranging from estate planning to sex—you're not alone.

According to a new survey, Americans are paying a very high price for their avoidance. In fact, one in five respondents say they have lost a friendship or estranged a family member due to avoiding a difficult conversation. And one in 10 report more serious repercussions, including poor health or a lack of financial security.

The survey and the Web site www.HaveTheTalkAmerica.com are part of the Have The Talk initiative to help people get past the barriers keeping them from actually having important discussions. The Web site offers everything from "digital icebreakers" to tailored tips from Harvard communications expert Sheila Heen.

"As the survey shows, especially in regard to our financial health, families often have difficulty actually having important conversations, even though they know they're necessary," said Heen, co-author of "Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most." "Nationwide created Have The Talk to help families get past some of the barriers. Once people begin to actually have those talks, things happen and decisions can be made."

The survey explored differences in how Americans approach difficult conversations, and the topics that most often become the "elephant in the room" among families. The 1,620 people surveyed revealed that the problem is widespread. In fact, 43 percent of married people say they purposely avoid difficult conversations with their spouse because bringing it up will only start a fight.



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While not having enough money is the issue most likely to start a conflict in their families (46 percent), other hot-button topics include:

- health concerns (42 percent)
- household budgeting (40 percent)
- running out of savings (38 percent)
- philosophy on raising kids (36 percent)
- use of credit (36 percent).

The survey also revealed the lengths that people have gone to to avoid such difficult conversations:

- screening phone calls or e-mails (38 percent)
- telling a lie (25 percent)
- cutting off all contact with a person (19 percent).

Nearly one in 10 respondents (9 percent) confessed to skipping a meal, working late when they didn't really have to or even physically hiding.

www.HaveTheTalkAmerica.com includes a variety of tools to help make it a little easier to Have The Talk, including a quiz that visitors can take to obtain customized tips based on their individual communication style.