

Forget shouting



While many people try to steer clear of arguments with family members, two Vanderbilt University philosophy professors offer a better solution.

Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse co-wrote *Why We Argue (and How We Should): A Guide to Political Disagreement*.

The trend to avoid arguments with loved ones has more to do with how bad we are at arguing than how strong our beliefs are, according to Aikin. “The better solution would be to improve our skill at making arguments in ways that allow for better, more reasoned exchange.”

Aikin and Talisse suggest the following:

- Remember that reasonable and intelligent people disagree about important matters. Keep this in mind even when your relative says something appalling.
- When arguing, be sure to acknowledge your family member’s good points.

- Be prepared to say what it would take for you to change your mind. Consider what evidence would make your view wrong.
- Know the weak points about your view. Be able to articulate what the best arguments against your view are.

“Acknowledging the opposition’s good points and seeing troubles for your own side are too often taken to be a sign of weakness,” Aikin said. “But it’s that attitude that actually makes us bad at argument and makes argumentative exchange so unpleasant and dogmatic. Instead, these habits make exchanges more reasonable and productive.”