

Conflict Resolution

by Beverly Littau

Conflict is a part of life. It cannot be avoided completely, because as long as there are people, there will be differences of opinion! Conflict can be a very positive thing in our lives, if we view it as an opportunity to grow personally and in our relationships.

The goal of conflict should be reaching a solution that is acceptable to both people. When that isn't possible (and it sometimes isn't) then the goal should be reconciliation. We are looking for a way to be at peace with this person, while "agreeing to disagree."

The outcome of our conflicts will largely depend on our approach to it. Picture yourself in a conflict with someone you love, and ask yourself these questions:

- Do you have to win to be okay?
- Do you attack the other person's personality or character?
- Do you blame the other for the conflict instead of seeing your part?
- Do you give "the silent treatment?"
- Do you simply avoid conflict at all?
- Do you change the subject to avoid responsibility?
- Do you pout or withdraw?
- Do you punish or withhold love?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you may have some work to do on your conflict resolution skills. It may be important to realize that we often handle conflict in the way we were brought up, or we handle it in an equally dysfunctional way in an attempt to avoid handling it as our parents did.

The first thing to remember in dealing with conflict is that the person you love is wired different from you. We can avoid a mountain of conflict if we can learn to appreciate the differences of those we have relationships with. You may be serious and hard-working, and your partner may be more fun-loving. Both of those qualities are good. The goal is to have BALANCE in your relationship. You may be able to encourage your partner to be more disciplined, and he/she may be able to teach you to have fun! It's a win-win situation, if you can seek to appreciate the differences rather than argue over them.

Keep in mind that you will go a long ways towards resolution if you can attempt to *seek to understand* what your partner is saying. Hear his/her heart. Understand his/her point of view. It often helps to "get" why a person is so angry or hurt if we can see it through their eyes. Slow down and listen!

Just as you must listen to your partner's heart, you need to also *share your heart*. Talk about your feelings. Try using some healthy "I statements" instead of blaming statements.

This: "I feel scared when you don't call when you're going to be late."

Not This: "You are inconsiderate not to call when you're going to be late."

The first statement is about YOU. The second statement is a label ("inconsiderate") you are giving your partner.

It is also a good idea during a conflict to *realize that there is always some truth* in what the other person's point of view is. Try to look for something that you two can agree on. For example, if you are arguing about balancing your budget, what can you agree on? Here are some possibilities:

- Agree that costs need to be cut.
- Agree that each of you has a part in the problem.
- Agree that if you don't resolve the issue, you are headed for financial disaster.
- Agree that some costs can't be cut because they are necessities.

As you work to resolve the conflict, keep your *anger in check*. Remember that it is pointless to continue to argue once your anger has reached the boiling point, because at that point you have kicked into the adrenaline of "fight or flight," and you are no longer thinking in ways that are helpful or productive. If that happens simply take a time out, and come back to the conflict when you are calmer.

If your partner is a person that you trust and you know he/she wants the best for you, then it is important to *hold onto the positive perception* in the midst of a conflict. Sometimes couples make the mistake of actually seeing their partner differently when in conflict. The husband who was a great guy, good provider, and had a good sense of humor yesterday is now a bad person, a slouch, and obnoxious. True? Of course not, so try to keep in focus the positive view of the person in spite of your current feelings!

Another important thing to do in the midst of a conflict is to *make a clear statement of your love and commitment* to your partner. Saying it out loud does two things. First, it reassures your loved one. Second, you also are hearing yourself say it and it reminds you. Hopefully it will remind you that you are on the same team! If the two of you can begin to be on the same team "against" the problem, then you will have the spirit of working together instead of working against each other.

Finally, keep in mind that problems may only get bigger if you each bring your families into the midst of it. Try not to confide in family members about your struggles (except in cases of abuse, of course). They may take sides and that will only escalate the problem.

If you and your loved one argue about the same issue over and over, you may want to consider reading some self-help books, attending a marriage conference or marriage weekend retreat, or even seek counseling.

When you learn to handle conflict in a healthy way, you will find that it can be the road to more understanding of your partner and lead to deeper intimacy.

Bible Verses to Consider

Hebrews 12:15 "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

2 Timothy 2:23 "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels."

Ephesians 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Romans 12:18 "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Psalm 139:23 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Lamentations 3:40 “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.”

Proverbs 16:21 “The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction.”

Ephesians 4:3 “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

Colossians 3:13 “Be gentle and ready to forgive.”