



How to Resolve Conflict Effectively

Every relationship has conflict. You simply can't put two human beings together for an extended period of time, let alone several years, and never have any conflict develop.

Unfortunately, many couples simply don't know how to handle conflict and resolve it effectively when it does occur. Without those skills, your relationship is going to continue being a struggle for both of you.

Unresolved conflict is like a cut on your finger that becomes infected. Even if it starts out very small, it can quickly become very painful and cause a lot of distress. Cleaning out the wound may be painful initially, but it is necessary if the wound is ever going to heal.

Unresolved conflict is very destructive and may ultimately destroy your relationship. But if you learn to make a few changes in your approach, you will resolve conflict in your relationship much more quickly and smoothly.

Keep in mind that if you are fighting, you must fight fair. Fighting dirty is akin to sucker punching your partner. It's going to make him angry and he may retaliate (or withdraw) in response. If it's difficult for the two of you to talk without it escalating to a fight, set some ground rules to which you both must agree. Then stick to them! It won't be easy, but it will make a world of difference in your relationship!

Here are some guidelines to help you (some have been mentioned previously, but they are worth repeating):

Know what you want. This may sound funny (odd) but you need to know the outcome you expect.

Some people just want to fight. If that's you, be honest about it. Don't pretend to seek a solution if you simply want to argue.

That said, if you truly want to resolve conflict that is interrupting your relationship, write down what you want out of the discussion. Having a clear goal in mind keeps you on track and serves as a reminder of what the conversation is all about.

Do not under-estimate this step. It's probably the most important.

Stay calm. ALWAYS. This is not going to be easy but is one of the most important things you can do when trying to resolve a conflict that is plaguing your relationship. When your partner is hurtful or angry, if you stay calm, you may disarm him and he will be more likely to retreat. It will also help keep your conversation from escalating (because it takes two for that to happen!).

Really listen to what your partner is saying, as well as what he is communicating non-verbally as well. If he is particularly angry, chances are he just really wants you to hear him. If you haven't done that in the past, now is the time to start. Let him finish before you respond.

Truly listening is a way of showing both courtesy and respect. You may have been impatient to respond or defensive and reactive - waiting to jump in edgewise rather than really paying attention.

Never interrupt or attempt to talk over your partner. I know I've said this before a couple of times, but I can't stress it enough. This is a great way to infuriate him, as it is very disrespectful and clearly conveys the message you think your words are more important than his. Also, it is very rude behavior.

Don't dredge up past hurts or wrongs. Leave the past in the past. Bringing it up again is never productive and will only widen the rift between you. It also gives the impression that you are keeping score. And it will almost inevitably put your partner on the defensive.

Work out your conflicts in private. When you confront your partner or try to discuss relationship matters, doing it when others are around will not only be very uncomfortable, it may make your partner feel like you've set him up. Give both your partner and others the courtesy of keeping these matters between the two of you.

Don't engage in childish fighting. Name calling, bullying, or pulling in friends to take your side, for example, are behaviors that at best belong on a grade school playground, not in an adult relationship.

Take ownership of your role in the conflict. Blaming everything on your partner will get you nowhere (except perhaps alone).

Don't take the stance that your partner is wrong and you are right. Being right is highly overrated, and the need to always be right will make you a very undesirable relationship partner. Strive for understanding, mutual resolution, and kindness instead.

Always try to find the grain of truth (even if seems *very tiny*) in anything your partner says. He most likely is not totally to blame, and therefore probably has some valid points. Listen for them and acknowledge your agreement.

Don't use extreme words such as "always" or "never" to describe any of your partner's behaviors. Not only are these highly unlikely to be true, they will tap into your partner's desire to stop opening up.

It takes two to tango and you both need to take ownership of your part in the conflict.

If you are serious about saving your marriage, or resolving your conflicts, you may want to discuss these guidelines with your partner and ask them if they agree that they are reasonable.

If he does, ask him if he will commit to following them whenever you have a potentially heated conversation.

Remember, you are fighting FOR your marriage, not BECAUSE of your marriage. Fight for it, not in it.

Special Bonus:

Denis Waitley (in my opinion) is one the leading success coaches and inspirational speakers of all time. He has an incredible way of distilling difficult concepts into practical, applicable tools you can use to create the life of your dreams.

In his landmark seminar '**How to Handle Conflict and Manage Anger**' he discusses the it's not so much what happens in our daily lives that matters, but how we perceive and respond to those events that determines our success or failure.

This program is available through Nightingale Conant, a leader in self-help and relationship programs.

In How to Handle Conflict and Manage Anger you'll discover:

- **5 myths about anger** and conflict – and what the truth really is.
- **4 steps** that will keep you cool, calm and in control most of the time.
- 5 conflict-escalating words that should **be avoided at all costs**.
- 5 styles of conflict management: **dominator, compromiser, withdrawer, and collaborator**.
- **10 conflict-resolution skills** everyone must know.
- 6 tips on **handling harassment and hardball tactics**.
- **7 negotiating styles**.

This is not just for the business world. These concepts and principles are excellent for working through issues with those we love the most.

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