

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

-Winston Churchill

Couples have two types of conflicts. Problems may be "solvable," that is, in the right circumstances, the problem can be solved and will probably not recur, or "perpetual," those problems that occur throughout the course of the relationship, that are distressing and tend to get the couple caught in the same argument repeatedly. The difference between the two types of problems isn't what the couple argues about, it's how they have the argument. When the argument gets very emotional and feels all-too-familiar, it's probably a perpetual problem.

Most people don't realize it's possible to find a way to live with perpetual problems and still love and enjoy each other.

There are conversational habits and patterns of thinking that you can change, and that will make it easier in the next disagreement you have with your partner. Even really old, stuck problems may shift and become less overwhelming.

Conflict is inevitable,
but combat is optional.

-Max Lucade

Conflict Doesn't Have to Hurt Your Communication



Conflict? Something Must Be Wrong

Conflict is as natural to the human experience as thunderstorms are to springtime. When left unaddressed though, conflict can generate heat and discomfort, cause lasting harm and even destroy relationships. Couples who experience too much conflict and discord for too long can end up divorcing. But when differences are openly acknowledged and addressed, conflicts can be a powerful source of energy and lead to creative solutions that encourage growth, deepen intimacy and strengthen bonds between people.

“We Never Fight!”

Some relationships appear to have no conflict. This can mean that everyone is in tune with everyone else. But what's more likely is that some people are not being honest and open, or that some regularly avoid and acquiesce to each other. This is true with a couple, in a family, or work group. When conflict appears to be totally absent, usually this means a lot is going unsaid. For some, inability to face conflict comes from old fears, such as the fear of being harmed by another. Some people may believe that conflict is inherently bad and that people are just doomed to feel bad when there's a disagreement.

Finding the Way to “Wins”

In avoiding conflict, people may lose track of how to express what they truly feel or want or believe. Conflict unaddressed converts to stress. This causes chronic illness and may result in rage, withdrawal, irritability and unhappiness. However, with discussion comes the release of fear and tension, often leading to clarity and creative solutions or ideas. People may experience a feeling of closeness or at the very least a deeper understanding, acceptance and respect for one another. If you are reluctant to engage in addressing conflict, consider the following:

- it's more important to find clarity and unity than to be right
- there is usually a win-win solution somewhere
- dealing with conflict keeps us from living in fear
- taking on conflict helps us clarify differences in values, and can bring us closer
- addressing conflict shows respect

Dealing with conflict requires a commitment to clarity, to listening with an open mind and heart, and to respecting and valuing one another's differences.



Agreeing on Guidelines

Following are some guidelines for working through conflicts. In some cases it may be helpful to have a third person help guide you through the conversation.

Commit to talk until you reach a solution.

If you need a break, agree on a time to resume.

Each person names the problem or conflict from their own viewpoint.

Take time for personal silent reflection.

Affirm that there must be a way to live with this problem.

Tell each other any thoughts, concerns or considerations that arise.

If you can't find a solution, you may need to accept that you disagree, or get professional help to continue working on the issue.

Because conflict is natural, acknowledge and support differences as part of the ongoing and dynamic experience of being in a relationship.

