

Constructive Conflict

Love Lessons:

How to use fair fighting to produce good decisions

Although many family disagreements never reach the level of "conflict", everyone experiences controversy sometimes. Debating and decision-making are parts of any healthy relationship. Well-managed disagreement can be a useful means of solving problems. Conflict helps more than one side of the issue to get explored, several alternatives exposed, and the consequences of each option examined.

A Few Ideas To Make Your Conflict More Constructive:

- 1) Choose your time and place carefully.** Initiate conflict only in private without uninvolved people present, and when others who are involved are open to the process of conflict resolution.
- 2) See discussion as Win-Win.** No one loses if what is best for all concerned stays as the chief goal. Agree on process, goals, decision to be reached, and the time available for the discussion.
- 3) Keep personal attacks as Out of Bounds.** Words focus on finding the best solution, not hurting others. Anyone can blow the whistle and call, "Foul!"
- 4) Find adequate information to resolve the conflict, or take a Time Out.** Without the facts, the dialogue is just an emotional argument; table the decision until more information is found.
- 5) Change Behaviors (not people).** The goal of conflict resolution isn't to affix blame, but to fix a problem. Change what you're doing that's not working. God hates sinful behavior, not sinners.
- 6) Find a point of Agreement.** Restate goals you share and your respect for the others involved so you're on the same team against the problem in a finding a strategy to satisfy everyone.
- 7) Use "I Messages".** Nonblamefully describe the situation, your feelings, the reasons for them, and your requests: "When no help is given to me, I feel angry, because I can't do it alone. Will you please help me now?"
- 8) Confess your Mistakes first.** Admit how you contributed to the conflict. Take responsibility for what you did wrong. Confess and ask forgiveness. Make amends. Accept any apologies, too.

9) Give Reprimands only to proven performers. If you criticize, then only do it to someone with a record of success at the task and be very precise about what is wrong and what you want.

10) When Attacked:

- a. Get out of the way. Use the karate principle and let it go by (the attackers will lose their balance often), notice what happened, and offer to help by discussing the conflict together.
- b. Agree. If their goal is to hurt you, defuse the attack by saying, "You're right," and smile. You have defused the conflict by implying, "So what?"
- c. Ignore it. Turn the other cheek after you look at the insulter in the eye (a powerful gesture), then move on. Pretend you're safely in the balcony watching the attack down on the stage.

11) Give it Time. Count to ten to allow the emotion to cool down and the mind to find solutions. After the first rush of anger subsides, then confront the problem, not the other person.

12) Have lots of Little Conflicts. To avoid conflict, people protect, swallow, deny, and hide their feelings, which usually leads to a big blow-up later. Be honest often. Deal with the molehill.

13) Find more Options. If the conflict is yes-or-no, then find a third option [like, MAYBE, LATER, IF/THEN, WHEN/THEN]. Be creative brainstorming alternatives and negotiating together.

14) Agree on the Future. Your conflict needs to focus upon the problem now, and your solution on an action to be taken soon. Make a commitment to your long-term healthy relationship.

15) Ask for Changes. Don't just gripe, but contract for something to be started, stopped or changed so that the complaint will end. From, It's cold. To, Please turn up the thermostat.

16) Paraphrase. Ask for and give feedback to be certain you both understand content, feelings, reasons, tones, job descriptions, and non-verbal communications. {Don't just parrot it back.}

17) Stay in the Present. Limit yourselves to one issue at a time. If you skip around, admit it, and then return to the here-and-now issue. Have an agenda. Agree to come back to other things later.

18) Consider the priority of the Relationship. You could avoid, compromise, compete, wait, dominate, collaborate, negotiate, capitulate, cooperate, separate, mediate, litigate, tolerate, . . .

19) Assume nothing. You are no mind reader; check out your perceptions; do not predict. Don't ascribe meaning to their behavior. Let others speak for themselves. Listen for new information.

20) Allow Emotions. Do not mind-rape by telling others what they feel or think. Take them at their word. Do not correct their statements. Encourage them to express feelings and validate them.

21) Assign no Labels. Don't call names or make judgments. Use the Golden Rule to treat others as you want them to treat you, even in a fight. Don't describe them or their behavior negatively.

22) Limit the loads of Grievances. The straw that broke the camel's back could've waited until tomorrow. Don't gunnysack problems, hoard hurts, or group irritations to deal with at once.

23) Pray. Take time before conflict resolution to ask God for guidance. When you are in a conflict, pray for all the forms of love in 1 Corinthians 13. After a conflict, pray for all the others involved to be blessed and for you to be forgiven any mistakes. During conflict, pray for what is best for all concerned to be the resolution, and for reconciliation with all those involved.