



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

## Counseling and Family Services

515 Highland Street, Morton, IL 61550 ❖ Tel: (309) 263-5536 Fax: (309) 263-6841 ❖ [www.accounseling.org](http://www.accounseling.org)

### Basic Conflict Resolution Skills

As we have seen in our previous articles, our communication has the potential to be a great blessing to others but also a source of discord and disunity. James' description of our tongue as a fire (*James 3:6*) is very accurate. In this article, we will look at some principles which can give guidance in the area of conflict. Though we never like to think about it and try to avoid it, conflict does surface in our relationships. It is critical we learn to properly respond to this conflict. Scripture tells us, "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*" (*Rom. 12:18*). We will look at seven principles of conflict resolution and a few other key components of this topic.

#### Principles of Conflict Resolution

##### 1. Conflict will happen.

Occasional conflict in relationships is both normal and inevitable. However, how people handle conflict (submitting yourself to the flesh or the Spirit) determines whether it harms your relationship or helps you to grow.

*John 16:33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."*

##### 2. Active listening.

Active listening is a key skill to understanding each other and in dealing with conflict.

*James 1:19, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:"*

*Proverbs 18:13, "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."*

##### 3. Guard your tongue.

Avoid speaking quickly and angrily. Criticism, sarcasm, and put-downs are hurtful to your relationships.

*Proverbs 29:11, "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards."*

*Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."*

*Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."*

##### 4. Speak the truth in a loving manner.

Working through conflict successfully takes honest and truthful communication done in a loving manner. Remember to examine your motives. Would you be able to receive it, if someone came to you in this manner? Love is a very considerate awareness of the other person.

*Ephesians 4:25, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another."*

*Ephesians 4:15, "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:"*

## **5. Resolve anger.**

Deal with anger and hurt proactively. Don't deny it, "stuff" it, or let it turn to bitterness. This is especially important in close relationships such as family or marriage relationships.

*Ephesians 4:26-27, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil."*

*Hebrews 12:15, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;"*

## **6. Forgiveness is essential.**

The ongoing practice of seeking forgiveness and being forgiving is essential to healthy, Christ-centered relationships.

*Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*

*1 Peter 3:8-9, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."*

## **7. Disagreements will happen.**

Accept that you will not agree on everything. Forbearance [patient restraint] is an act of love.

*Colossians 3:12-15, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."*

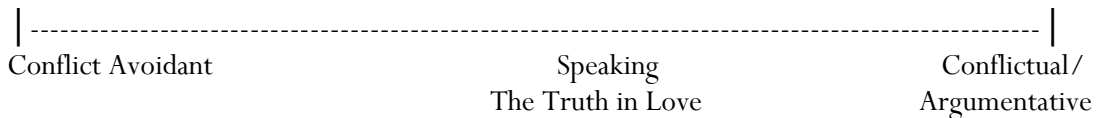
## **A Few Other Thoughts**

### **A. Is conflict always bad?**

Does having no conflict automatically mean that you have a better relationship? No! Conflict isn't automatically good or bad. Rather, how it is handled makes the difference. Healthy conflict generates "light," while unhealthy conflict simply generates "heat." Interestingly, having no conflict in a relationship may actually be an indicator that the individuals are avoiding issues that need to be discussed. Ideally, seek to have the least amount of conflict possible in your relationship, realizing that when it does occur, you can find ways to work through it for your betterment.

**B. Avoid the extremes.**

1. People who are "conflict avoidant" in relationships will do just about anything to avoid an argument. While this may be a good quality in many situations, those who avoid conflict may also avoid bringing up important spiritual, emotional, and relationship issues. Those who are "conflictual/argumentative" in relationships may tend to provoke arguments from time to time. While you will always know where these individuals stand on an issue, they may speak words harshly and put others down.
2. Jesus provided us with a perfect example for dealing with conflict. Sometimes He was silent or said few words (see *Matthew 27:11-14; John 8:3-11*), while other times He spoke quite firmly and directly (see *Matthew 23*). Jesus always spoke to the heart of the matter and always focused on the other person's eternal good (see *Matthew 10:17-22*). He did not avoid conflict due to fear of man; however, He did not seek to be argumentative (see *Matthew 15:1-12*). Thus, no right answer exists for every situation. Match your response to the needs of the situation.
3. Where do you fall on the continuum below? Note that if you tend to be "conflict avoidant," you will need to practice speaking in a firm and direct manner, whereas, if you are more "conflictual/argumentative," you will need to practice holding your tongue.



**C. When conflict occurs, be careful how and when you talk to each other...and seek to understand the other side.**

Use the model provided in *James 1:19-20* where it says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Think through each step and principle:

1. Be swift to hear
2. Be slow to speak
3. Slow to wrath

Also, it is vital to realize there are essentially two layers to most conversations:

1. Event: the topic at hand.
2. Issue: the "under-the-surface" feelings, meanings, and goals.

Many conflicts are never solved because the parties are actually arguing about different hidden issues. Healthy, helpful communication occurs when discussion is on the same issue. Always seek to

understand the other party and purpose to communicate on the same issue. This will go a long way in resolving conflict.

#### **D. Additional ground rules for good conflict resolution.**

1. Stay on one topic: Trying to resolve multiple issues in one conversation can add confusion and more misunderstanding.
2. Don't dredge up the past: Bringing up past words, actions, etc. can be very hurtful to others and damage trust.
3. Avoid "You" statements: Starting sentences with accusations (even if they are true) will put others on the defensive ("You never listen."). Seek to build safety in your communication.
4. Use "I" statements: Speak from your perspective. "I feel frustrated when the garbage isn't taken out after I have asked you to take care of it."
5. Control the tone of your voice: "*A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*" (*Proverbs 15:1*).
6. Don't lecture each other or treat like a child: Remember that we are "*heirs together of the grace of life*" (*1 Peter 3:7*) and that we should treat each other as such.

#### **E. The steps of good problem solving.**

When you have an issue that isn't solved through communication alone, go through the steps below. For minor issues, you can move through the steps fairly quickly. However, for emotionally-charged, difficult issues you should move through the steps slowly and deliberately.

1. Find an appropriate time and setting to discuss the issue (*Ecclesiastes 3:1*).
2. Decide what issue is going to be discussed.
3. Define the problem clearly from both points of view.
4. State what you can agree on.
5. Brainstorm together for possible solutions.
6. Summarize, compromise, and agree upon a plan of action to try.
7. Pray to God for help to take the necessary steps and to make progress.
8. Identify a time to meet together again to evaluate your progress.
9. If you continue to have difficulty or cannot find a way to solve the issues on your own, seek counsel from an elder, minister, mentor, or counselor. *Proverbs 12:15* says, "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.*"

We will finish this article with a repeat of the verse we quoted at the beginning. *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18)*. Our opportunity and responsibility lies in striving for this peaceful living with all men. Godly, healthy communication is difficult, but God’s grace is sufficient. May we strive to reach the standard He places before us and may the words of our mouth *“be acceptable in His sight.” (Ps. 19:14)*



### Conflict Resolution Resources

ACCFS offers several resources on conflict resolution. One such resource, *Self-Examination: When Experiencing Relationship Conflict*, looks at questions to ask oneself to help determine the nature or root of relational conflict. It, along with other resources, is available on our website at [www.accounseling.org/mentoring](http://www.accounseling.org/mentoring). There you can also sign up for our resource email announcements.