

# Conflict Resolution



Apostolic Christian Counseling & Family Services  
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James  
1:19

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

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## Dealing With Conflict

What does the Bible say?

### Conflict: The Reality

- Occasional conflict in relationships is both normal and perhaps even inevitable.
- Working through conflict successfully takes **honest** and **truthful** communication done in a loving, **considerate** manner. (*Ephesians 4:15*)
- Remember to examine your motives.
  - Would you be able to receive it, if someone came to you in this manner?

### Conflict: Forgiveness

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

Horizontal

Vertical

*Colossians 3:13*, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

Vertical

**Seeking** forgiveness and **being** forgiving is essential to a healthy, Christ-centered marriage.

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### Conflict: Acceptance & Forbearance

- Accept you will not agree on everything. Forbearance is an act of love.

*“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.”*

*Colossians 3:13-14*

- **Acceptance Definition #1**
  - To bless/To be thankful for
- **Acceptance Definition #2**
  - To acknowledge reality

Sometimes we can’t do the first...but in order to handle life well, we must do the second.

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## Ways People Handle Conflict

Do you run toward it?  
Away from it?



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## Handling Conflict: Rate Yourself

Conflict-Avoidant



Speaking the  
Truth in Love

Conflictual -  
Argumentative



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## Events and Issues: Seek Common Ground

- There are two layers to most conversations:
  - **Events** – the topic at hand.
  - **Issues** – the “under-the-surface” feelings, meanings, and goals.
- Always seek to communicate on the same issue.



Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg *Enriching Your Marriage*

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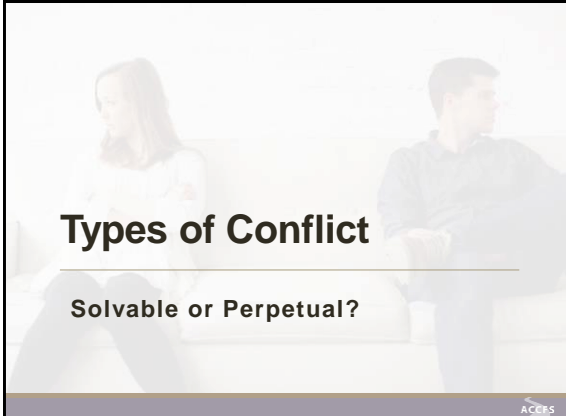
## Master Your Stories

- In between a person's action and our reaction, we tell ourselves a story.
- Stories are:
  - Our interpretation of the facts.
  - Help us answer why and how and what.
- Watch the downward spiral.
  - Don't let emotions or stories run away from you.
- Learn to separate fact from story.

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## Types of Conflict

Solvable or Perpetual?



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## Conflict: Perpetual Problems

- When choosing to marry a particular person, you will inevitably be choosing a set of unsolvable problems you will be dealing with for the rest of your life.
  - Potentially 69% of conflicts within marriage are unsolvable.
- Not addressing perpetual conflict can lead to gridlock and emotional disengagement.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF MAKING MARRIAGE WORK (GOTTMAN AND SILVER, 2015)

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## Conflict: Solvable vs. Perpetual

### SOLVABLE

- Situational
- Less intense, simply about the topic.
- A solution can be found and maintained.
- Solvable topics for one couple can be perpetual for another couple.

### PERPETUAL

- Centers on fundamental differences in personality or lifestyle.
- Generally more intense, deeper meaning behind position.
- The conflict keeps coming up.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF MAKING MARRIAGE WORK (GOTTMAN AND SILVER, 2015)



## Conflict: Cascade Toward Isolation

Flooding (feeling overwhelmed)

Problems seen as severe

Best to handle problems alone

Parallel lives

Loneliness

THE MARRIAGE CLINIC: A SCIENTIFICALLY BASED MARITAL THERAPY (GOTTMAN, 1999)



## Conflict: Perpetual Management

- Acknowledge the problem and talk about it.
- Seek to understand each other's subjective realities.
- Communicate acceptance of your spouse.
- Seek to approach the problem with good humor.
- Don't forget to build friendship within your marriage.
- Negative emotions are important and hold information about how to better love each other.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF MAKING MARRIAGE WORK (GOTTMAN AND SILVER, 2015)



## Dealing With Anger

*"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."*

Proverbs 16:32



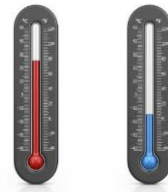
## Anger: Be Proactive

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

*"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."* **Hebrews 12:15**



## Anger: Unhealthy/Healthy Ways to Handle



### Unhealthy

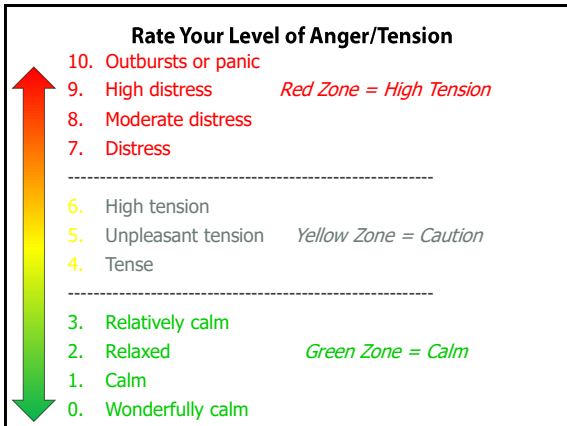
1. Suppress it
2. Be Aggressive
3. Be Passive-Aggressive

### Healthy

1. Be Assertive / Direct with Respect
2. Drop It

ADAPTED FROM THE ANGER WORKBOOK, DR. LES CARTER AND DR. FRANK MINIRTH, 1983





### Anger: Zone Suggestions

<b>Zone</b>	In the Red Zone (7-10): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't try to figure out any problems right now.</li> <li>• Take steps to calm your body down such as going for a walk, writing out your feelings, engaging in a calming activity, and taking deep breaths.</li> </ul>
<b>Zone</b>	In the Yellow Zone (4-6): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware you can quickly move into the Red Zone so pay attention and work to stay calm.</li> </ul>
<b>Zone</b>	In the Green Zone (1-3): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideally, we would always talk to each other here.</li> <li>• It is the best place to be able to communicate in Christ-likeness and with the other person's best interest in mind.</li> </ul>



### Unhealthy Conflict: Four Horsemen

- Types of negative interactions poisonous to marriages:
  - "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."
  - Chronic presence of the Four Horsemen predicts divorce by 82%!

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

### Unhealthy Conflict: Four Horsemen

Four Horsemen	➔	Antidotes
1) <u>Criticism</u> – global negative statements.		1) Gentle Start-up
2) <u>Defensiveness</u> - "not my fault".		2) Take Responsibility
3) <u>Contempt</u> – words / gestures of disgust.		3) Describe your own feelings
4) <u>Stonewalling</u> – shutting spouse out.		4) Engage in self-calming skills



## God Takes Abuse Seriously

*"But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a **railer**, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." 1 Corinthians 5:11*

*"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, **nor revilers**, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Corinthians 6:9-10*

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## What is "Railing?"

### • "abuse, railing, reviling"

◦ From Vines: Greek meaning of the words *loidoria* (Noun; NT:3059) & *loidoros* (Adj.; NT:3060) used in the New Testament (Vines) for rail, railer, railing

• "(1) Clamoring with insulting language; uttering reproachful words. (2) Expressing reproach; insulting; as a railing accusation. 2 Peter 2."

◦ Webster 1828 definition of reviling

• "(1) To subject to verbal abuse, (2) To use abusive language"

◦ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary definition of revile

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## Abuse = Sin

• Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are never acceptable and should not be tolerated in your marriage.

### • **Abuse is sin.**

- Strikes at the very heart of the marriage
- Provides Satan with an opportunity to destroy individuals, marriage, and families.

• If abuse of any kind is occurring in your relationship, seek help immediately.

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## Emotional Abuse Characteristics

• Also called verbal, psychological, and/or mental abuse.

• Most common form of abuse, but hardest to identify.

*"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof." Proverbs 18:21*

• Characteristics of Emotional Abuse:

1. Chronic pattern.
2. May be hurtful words, anger outbursts, silence, gestures, threats, shaming, put downs, etc.
3. Used to control and manipulate a spouse.

• Occurs when a spouse uses spiritual-sounding language to dominate, control and/or demean the other spouse.

[www.accounseling.org/maritaldistress](http://www.accounseling.org/maritaldistress)

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## PERSONAL / COUPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What perpetual conflicts do you see in your marriage?
- Where do you fall on the continuum from "conflict avoidant" to "conflictual/argumentative"? What does this say about how you are likely to respond to conflict as a couple?

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## Appendix A

### Other Forms of Abuse

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## Abuse: Other Forms

### Power

- Denies basic rights
- Deprives of personal life
- Mandates duties
- Controls everything

### Intimidation

- Uses looks, actions, gestures, and voice to cause fear

### Economic Abuse

- Makes spouse ask for money
- Requires spouse to account for money spent as a way to control.

ANGRY MEN AND THE WOMEN WHO LOVE THEM: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE (HEGSTROM, 2004)

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## Abuse: Other Forms

### Humiliation

- Hostile Humor
- Publicly humiliates
- Degrades appearance, skills, or cooking

### Isolation

- Controls what is done, who is seen, who is talked to
- Limits or listens to phone calls

### Silence

- Uses silence as a weapon
- Does not talk
- Does not express emotion

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## Abuse: Other Forms

### Physical Abuse

- Biting, choking, grabbing, hitting, pinching, or smothering

### Property Violence

- Punches walls
- Destroys property
- Breaks down doors
- Throws things to intimidate

### Sexual Abuse

- Treats as sex object
- Interrupts sleep to demand sex
- Forces sex

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## Appendix B

### UNHEALTHY FORMS OF CONFLICT: FOUR HORSEMEN

## Unhealthy Conflict: Four Horsemen

### Criticism:

- Global negative statements about your spouse's character or personality.
  - **Example** – "Why are you so forgetful? I hate having to always sweep the kitchen floor when it's your turn. You just don't care."
- Instead of criticism, seek to use a complaint.
  - **Complaint** includes 1) Here's how I feel; 2) About a very specific situation; 3) Here's what I need/want/prefer.
  - **Example** – "I'm really frustrated that you didn't sweep the kitchen last night. We agreed that we'd take turns. Could you please do it now?"

The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work (Gottman and Silver, 2015)

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## Unhealthy Conflict: Four Horsemen

### Contempt: (#1 Predictor of divorce)

- Words or gestures that show your spouse you are disgusted and repulsed by him/her.
- Sarcasm, cynicism, ridicule, name-calling, mocking, disregard, hostile humor, etc.
- Contempt is fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts about your spouse.
- **Antidote:** Build a culture of appreciation and respect.

The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work (Gottman and Silver, 2015)

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## Unhealthy Conflict: Four Horsemen

### Defensiveness:

- Instead of listening to your spouse's position and talking through it, defensiveness is essentially saying, "The problem isn't me, it's you."
- Innocent victim, making excuses, cross complaining, saying, "yes, but..."
- Instead of defensiveness, seek to accept responsibility, even if only for part of the conflict.
- Defensiveness: "It's not my fault that we're always late, it's your fault."
- Antidote: "Well, part of this is my problem, I need to think more about time."

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## Unhealthy Conflict: Four Horsemen

### Stonewalling:

- Avoiding your spouse by shutting him or her out and not communicating (i.e, remaining silent and look down or away).
- This takes time to show up and is the result of becoming overwhelmed with frequent negativity.
- While the intent of this is generally to avoid fighting, it also avoids the marriage.
- Antidote: Seek ways to calm yourself and move from "red zone" to "green zone."

The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work (Gottman and Silver, 2015)

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## Appendix C

### Problem Solving

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## Conflict Resolution: Good Problem Solving

1. Find an appropriate time and setting to discuss the issue. (*Ecc. 3:1*)
2. Decide what issue is going to be discussed.
3. Define the type of conflict – solvable or perpetual.
4. Define the problem clearly - from both points of view.
5. State what you can agree on.
6. Brainstorm together for possible solutions.
7. With an attitude of mutual submission, summarize, compromise, and agree upon a plan of action to try.
8. Pray to God for help to take the necessary steps and to make progress.

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## Appendix D

### Sentiment Override

#### WHAT IS THE CLIMATE OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

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## Sentiment Override: What is it?

### POSITIVE OVERRIDE

- Positive thoughts about each other and your marriage that are so pervasive they supersede negative feelings.
- Spouses tend to attribute temporary negative emotion to a fleeting problem.

### NEGATIVE OVERRIDE

- Irritation, anger and resentment erode friendship.
- Things begin to be interpreted in a negative manner.
- Words said in a neutral tone of voice are taken personally.

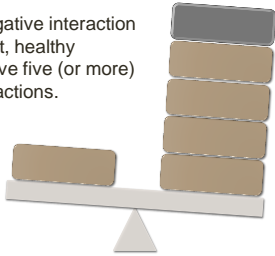
The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work (Gottman and Silver, 2015)

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## Sentiment Override: Positive

### 5:1 - Positive to Negative Ratio

For every negative interaction during conflict, healthy marriages have five (or more) positive interactions.



The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work (Gottman and Silver, 2015)

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