

CONFLICT TO RESOLUTION: Resolving Issues, Difficulties *without* Tearing Each Other Apart

ALL COUPLES EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS: No matter what stage of your life you are in, or how many years you have been married - you will *continually encounter problems!! The only people without problems are in cemeteries!* Problems reflect a core set of issues that need to be discussed, understood, and possibly resolved. Problems reflect that you both have differing ideas and beliefs - problems can enable you to learn more about yourself and your partner. Problems will either drive a wedge in-between you and cause you to fight, or cause you to discuss, understand, resolve, and grow - *it's your choice.*

YOU NEED TO DEVELOP A TEAM CONCEPT: You can combine mutual respect and skill to produce a powerful sense that you are a team working together to find solutions that will enhance your life. You have a choice - either you will nurture a sense that you are working together *against the problem* or you can continue in an adversarial approach. It's very common to approach problems as if your partner is the enemy to be conquered. Issues are approached as if there will be a winner and a loser. This kind of attitude is guaranteed to deepen the conflict and resentment.

DON'T RUSH TO FIND SOLUTIONS: Many well-intentioned attempts at problem solving fail because couples don't take time to understand the problem together; this prevents them from working out a solution that both partners can support.

PROCESS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION A COLLABORATIVE MODEL

PROBLEM DISCUSSION: Whether the problem is large or small, you shouldn't move on to problem solution until you both understand and feel understood by your partner, also meaning that you have discussed the issue in full. This means that you have each expressed your significant feelings and concerns on the topic in a *constructive* manner, and believe that the other person has clearly understood your point of view. ***Explore the underlying concerns.*** Go deeper seeking to find out and understand what is *really* going on. Placing a premium on validation in this phase results in an atmosphere of mutual respect, which allows the problem solution to proceed more smoothly.

Caution!! Fasten you seat belts!! *You just might discover that after having a good discussion that there may not be a need to move into a problem-solving stage!!* 70% of the issues couples deal with don't really need to be solved, just well discussed!

The major desire people have is for their partner to be a friend. A friend is someone who listens, who understands, and who validates. This kind of listening and validation occur in good problem-processing discussions. *Most of the time, what partners want most when they are upset is not agreement or even change, but just to feel heard and understood.*

PROBLEM SOLUTION

Setting Agendas: The key is to make very clear what you are trying to solve at this time. Describe your issues as if you were watching a video - this helps you to get some distance so you can see with better clarity. Often your discussion will take you through many facets of an issue. You need to decide what to focus on. The more specific the problem you are tackling now, the better your chances of finding a workable and satisfying solution. Focus on the more manageable pieces, one at a time.

Brainstorm: Any ideas can be suggested - one of you should write down the ideas. Don't evaluate the ideas during this session - either verbally or nonverbally (careful of negative body language). Be creative - whatever comes to mind. Have fun - this can be a great time for humor!

How do you each Contribute to the Problem? Figure out the things you each do that have contributed to the problem.

Agreement & Compromise: The goal is to come up with a specific solution or combination of solutions that you both agree to try. The more specific you are about the solution, the more likely it is that you'll follow through. Note: the solution is not likely to help unless you both agree to try it. Often the best solution will be a compromise in which neither of you gets everything you wanted. The reason is that you won't have a great marriage if you get your way all the time. The goal is to help you win as a team, with solutions that show mutual respect and bring you closer as a couple.

Follow-Up: It is just as important to follow up to see how the agreement is working out. Two key advantages - one, solutions often need to be "tweaked" to work in the long run. Two, following up builds accountability.

FOCUS:	
One Problem - DO:	Larger Issues - DON'T:
1. Focus on the Problem or Issue,	1. Focus on the Person,
2. Focus on Behaviors,	2. Focus on Character,
3. Be Specific,	3. Be General,
4. Express Needs & Feelings,	4. Make Character Judgments,
5. Make "I" Statements,	5. Make "You" Statements,
6. Observe facts,	6. Judge Motives,
7. Work towards Mutual Understanding.	7. Strive for "Win / Lose" Attitude.

	HIGH		HIGH
	X - Compete		X - Collaborate!
Concern for Self		X - Compromise	
	X - Avoid		X - Accommodate
	LOW	Concern for Partner	LOW