

Resolving Conflict in Marriage

“The goal in a relationship should be to prevent as much conflict as possible.”

“The “thing” at stake...is the health of the relational connection.”

“Will you allow the conflict to tear your connection apart? Or will you fight for your connection in the midst of conflict?” Danny Silk “Keep Your Love On”

Our Differences Will Bring Conflict

- Because of differences between men and women and their past experiences, anger and conflict in marriage are almost inevitable.
- While short-term anger is common, letting hurt feelings become long-term frustrations can be damaging and fatal to a marriage.
- If anger is *not* dealt with it can act like sulfuric acid and eat away at a couple's love and commitment.

Reasons why People get Angry

1. Legitimate violation of a boundary
2. Ignorance – misunderstanding of the differences in men and women
3. Immaturity
4. Unrealistic expectations
5. Stress
6. Control

Anger and temper are the two most destructive elements in any relationship (spouse, kids, others).

- Temper reveals what is inside you.
- Anger is primarily rooted in fear, but also pride, self-righteousness, self-protection, unloving nature, unforgiving, soulish thinking, and touchiness.
- Anger is evidence that our four basic love needs were not fully met (security, love, value and acceptance). **An angry person does not feel loved, valued, and accepted.**
- It can also be a symptom of not feeling comfortable with love or not feeling you have a place in Father's heart.
- Anger has the power to break down relationships. It destroys trust and causes us to pull away.
- We either turn all our anger outward and become toxic and hard to be around, or
- we can be passive and turn all our angry feelings inward. This can eat at us and turn to depression and feeling badly about ourselves.
- **It is important to deal with anger in a constructive way.**

Anger is a type of adult pain rooted in fear.

- These are "relational fears" like: rejection, disconnection, being controlled, failure, invalidation, worthlessness, unhappiness, scorned, feeling devalued, inferior, or ignored.
- The argument begins when either a husband or wife's "hot buttons" are pushed. These are the comments or actions that bring out the relational fears and negative feelings about oneself.
- Ask yourself, "Why does that bother me so much?"
- Each hot button elicits a strong response which sends a relational message to the other person and pushes their hot button. You've just started the "hot button dance!"

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- The other person's dysfunctional reaction only makes things worse and away you go.
- You need to stop the dance and begin to listen, forgive, validate and accept each other.
- We all have un-Christ-like responses. We need to immediately go to the Holy Spirit and ask for Him to reveal the spiritual root of why we are reacting the way we are.
- Are there Ungodly Beliefs, bitter root expectations, judgments, demonic interference, etc.?

Power struggles are also the result of unresolved anger.

- It often takes twelve months into a marriage before power issues surface. It is all about "who is in control."

Stages of a Power Struggle

- **Level 1: Issues are constantly raised, but never resolved.** Small frustrations build up, and nothing is resolved. The "floating," or unresolved, frustration simply attaches to anything that moves.
- **Level 2: As problems pile up, we drop the issue and begin to pick on the other person.** We no longer focus on the issues or problems; instead we attack the other person. The battle heats up over who is going to change and who is in charge. We may hang onto our righteous position and forsake relationship.
- **Level 3: Finally the relationship is attacked.** We begin to question the relationship we are in. "If he (or she) is this kind of person..." Security leaves. Every issue from that point jumps from level 1 to 3 quickly and becomes grounds for divorce.

Anger can also be a smoke screen. It says, "I really want you to care about me and what I am feeling." "I think you will understand me if I use anger to show you how upset I am."

Anger in relationships may be what we learned from our parents. It can be passed from generation to generation. **You must decide what is it about you that you want to pass on to your children and what is it about you that you do not want to pass on to your children!**

Keeping Our Relational Circuits (RCs) ON is Foundational to Resolving Conflicts

Father God desires to have a relationship with us and created us to live in a relational world where we connect with other people and where people are bigger and more important than the problems. The "relational circuits" are the neural connections to parts of our brain that, among other things, affect our ability to make and maintain healthy life-giving relationships with other people. They keep us in a state of rest and peace where we can stay relational even in difficult situation or dealing with big emotions in ourselves or others. These connections are controlled by a part of our brain that is either ON, OFF, or DIM. *(for more information on RCs – www.thrivetoday.org)*

Here are a few things that we can do when our RCs are ON:

- 1) ***use all our senses***
- 2) ***regulate emotions***
- 3) ***work with others to reach understanding***
- 4) ***focus and shift attention***
- 5) ***respond instead of attack***
- 6) ***receive from others***
- 7) ***be flexible***
- 8) ***stay connected***
- 9) ***attune***
- 10) ***explore new solutions***
- 11) ***resolve conflicts***

If our RCs are OFF or DIM

- Our emotions are shut down or go out of control; there is no joy; and we have a difficult time receiving from others.
- We are not even aware that our RCs are off and we become more rigid and unwilling to compromise or work towards a solution.
- We become defensive and attack others. We blame others for our distress and problems.
- Problems become bigger than our relationships.
- We tend to amplify our distress and negative emotions and don't know when to stop.
- We don't realize the effects we are having on others. We treat people like objects.
- We can hurt those we love the most.
- We can overwhelm others and turn their RC's OFF too.
- Really bad things can happen when two non-relational brains collide!

Things that can turn OFF our RCs

1. We withdraw and hide because of being offended, rejected, embarrassed, ignored, or overlooked.
2. We get in fear of rejection, making a mistake, being made fun of, or something bad happening.
3. We get focused or too busy doing something and become unaware of Father or others around us.
4. We are hurt by someone's words, actions, looks, body language, sarcasm, criticized, or rudeness.
5. We lose basic trust, don't feel safe with someone, or are overwhelmed by their big emotions.

Warning signs that our RCs are OFF

- I just want to make a problem or feeling go away.
- I don't want to listen to what others feel or say.
- My mind is "locked onto" something upsetting
- I don't want to be connected to __ (someone I usually like)
- I just want to get away, or fight, or I freeze.
- I more aggressively interrogate, judge, and fix others.

Ways to turn our RCs back ON

- **Emanuel Moments** – close your eyes and get an image of being with Jesus or Father. See yourself talking and interacting with them. Or get an image of a time or place where you felt close to Father or sensed His presence.
- **Express appreciation** to Father, Jesus, or others for something they said or did for you.
- **Quiet or "Shalom" your body** (watch Jim Wilder demonstrate: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X87kwXYiMY0>)
- **Share 4+ joy stories** - share fun stories from your past with each other and include all of the feelings and emotions that you experienced during the original story.
- **Joy smiles** – look at each other and use your face to express your appreciation and the excitement you are having just being with them.
- **Touch and demonstrate tenderness** – gently embrace or non-sexually touch each other, depending upon what the other person can handle right now, and speak tender words to affirm your commitment to each other and your marriage.
- **Listen, forgive, validate, and accept** each other – try to understand what the other person has gone through, acknowledge that they are hurting, admit your offense, ask forgiveness

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Make sure that both of your RCs are ON before you attempt to begin resolving any conflict!

"Couples who keep their spirits "open" to each other when dealing with anger take giant strides towards intimacy..." Gary Smalley

Top 5 Reasons Couples Fight:

1. Work stress
2. Money *Fighting often occurs because we do not think the other person cares*
3. Children *about how I feel about these.*
4. Sex
5. Housework

Things that won't help resolve conflicts

- 1) **Avoidance** – You should never just "give in" and never express your feelings or opinion. Remaining silent (internalizing the anger, frustration, hurts, disappointments) doesn't work either. Being a "submissive wife" doesn't mean letting your husband run all over you. If you do give in, at least express how that makes you feel (ignored, taken advantage of, etc.)
- 2) **Manipulation** – Never use sex, anger, bribes, or other forms of control to get your own way.
- 3) **Side-tracking** – Do not try to raise different issues from the difficult one you are discussing just to get the other person off on some tangent and never deal with the real issue.

How to Escalate or Defuse a Conflict

- Hurt feelings, misunderstanding or relational messages are often the root cause for arguments. Anger begins to build.
- At this point you have two choices:
 - 1) flee, withdraw, or punish the partner with silence which will only escalate the conflict; or
 - 2) choose to face the conflict.
- If you face the conflict, you again have two choices:
 - 1) fight, accuse, demand, put down, or determine to win at all costs which again only escalates the conflict; or
 - 2) choose to talk, dialogue, and solve the problem
- ***There are always two sides to every issue, so it will take understanding, forgiveness, and compromise***
- **When a conflict is resolved, it will draw a couple closer together.**

Keys to Appropriately Expressing Anger

1. **Don't feel guilty about your anger.** You cannot deal with anger till you get it out. It may not be valid but it is real. Explore your anger until you find the root or answer for it.
2. **Cultivate an atmosphere of honesty and mutual respect.** If you are threatened by the complaints of your spouse, it says you are selfish and not committed to meeting their needs. Great strides in relationships are made when we give our spouse permission to tell us what is wrong with us without becoming defensive.
3. **Value the other person's feelings.** Couples fight for a variety of reasons, but they are fighting about things that are much deeper - heart issues.
4. **Agree that the time is right for both of you to talk.** After you have children, wait until they are in bed to handle issues.

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5. **When you come to your spouse with a justified criticism, come also with a possible solution.** Criticism hurts and condemnation without hope crushes, but a supportive comment will help take the sting out of your words.
6. **Watch your words and the tone of your voice.** The louder the voice, the less your mate will hear, and the uglier your words, the less will be communicated. Be tactful. Be sincere and open with your spouse yet respectful and taking care not to unnecessarily hurt him.
7. **Acknowledge that you are fallible.** Admit your mistakes and accept criticism. If you are right, don't say anything. *Do you want to be right or have a relationship?!*
8. **Take responsibility for your emotional reactions.** We cannot blame another person for our temper and outbursts.
9. It is important to **see the others person's side.** We all need empathy. Try to experience the conflict from the other person's point of view. Look beyond your hurt and see the other person's hurt.
10. **Come to your spouse in humility.** Communicate that what they did hurt, but don't attack.
11. We need to **deal with conflict in love.** Love thinks no evil, sees the bright side and sees the best in others. Allow Christ's spirit room to move in you. Exercise agape love!
12. **Be willing to learn God's lesson for you** so you can respond differently in the future. You should desire to come out a better person than before.
13. Use dialoguing to work on "radioactive" issues and issues that don't seem to get resolved with just talking.

How to defuse fights before they fester:

1. Show mutual respect – set boundaries “This conversation is getting disrespectful. I will be ready to continue when you're ready to show me your heart instead of telling me what's wrong with me.” *Care about each other's needs.*
2. Pinpoint the real issue. Take ownership of the problem and create effective solutions.
3. *Seek areas of agreement.*
4. Mutually participate in decisions. If you can't agree, postpone decisions.
5. Be specific – focus on concrete facts and not generalizations
6. Focus on the present and future
7. Use "I" messages, not "you" which places blame on your spouse.
8. **Don't try to figure out who is right and who is wrong.** The goal is cooperation not competition.
9. Set a time limit for discussing a problem.
10. **Engage in respectful conversations** (from *Keep Your Love On* by Danny Silk)
 - A respectful conversation has a goal, and it has a process for achieving that goal. Both parties must agree to the goal and follow the process for it to be respectful!
 - We strengthen the relationship when we discover what a person needs and how we can meet that need. You must dispel any doubt that you don't care about their need.
 - Each person must be vulnerable to share their needs without fear of rejection.
 - If you can't share your needs, you'll never get to the root issues and resolve the conflict.
 - Being both a good speaker and listener (one at a time!), you both must send clear messages to each other about the issue from your perspective.
 - If I listen well, I will get a clear idea of what you need and what I need.

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- Provide feedback to each other to make sure you heard them clearly. Don't offer opinions or judgments! Make sure you understand their emotions and feelings too.
 - With this information, you will start to identify and take ownership of the problem and create an effective solution.
 - With a servant's heart and humility, you can carry out the solution!
11. Plan to do something fun after you have resolved the conflict.

How to Return to Joy and Stay Relational In Negative Emotions

We are wired to feel the "Big Six" negative emotions. All other negative emotions stem from these six: **Fear, Anger, Sadness, Disgust, Shame, and Hopeless Despair.**

- We need to train our brain how to return to joy. We were all created to live in a state of pleased-to-be-with-you joy.
- Unfortunately, most of us learn how to manage or cope with the negative emotions instead of learning the path back to joy, the only way to really cancel out the negative emotions.
- Non-relational approaches never work. Only when we engage with other people who have joy and know how to get back to joy ourself will we be able to replace the negative emotions with joy.
- We can start the path back to joy with our spouse and help each other recover from negative emotions. Learn how to have fun together; watch funny movies; laugh a lot; leave notes and fun gifts that will bring a smile to your spouse; be childlike and fun-loving.
- Learn how to tell joy stories and remember the fun and good times dating and happy times after you were married.
- It's important to find fellowship with others who have the joy that we need. Join with others who know how to have fun and good times!
- Check out The **Thrivetoday.org** website and attend training opportunities <https://thrivetoday.org/>

Five Languages of Apology

1. Express regret in terms of feelings and emotions. "I feel sorry for..."
2. Accept responsibility for your actions and how they may have impacted your spouse.
3. Make restitution for any damage you may have done to the relationship.
4. Repent and assure the other person that you will not do it again.
5. Ask forgiveness for any wrong things that you may have done to hurt your spouse.

Changing negative/hurtful behavior in men

- Focus on the positive things that he does.
- Be thankful to God and him for the little things he does that could easily be overlooked.
- Be thankful for every effort he makes to change.
- Show your appreciation for his being willing to change.
- **Men thrive on appreciation and knowing what they are doing is helping or pleasing their wife!**

Worksheet Handout for Resolving Conflicts in Marriage

How to resolve conflicts is an important skill for every new couple to learn! Because of our differences, what happened to us growing up, and the choices we make before we get married, there are many opportunities to have conflict in our marriage. Conflict doesn't have to be something we dread or fear. We can learn some new skills and commit to work together through every disagreement and argument we may have in a healthy healing way. When we have the victory over any test or trial in our marriage, we will find that we develop a deeper bond and abiding love with our spouse, and we now carry one more thing in common. We can use every positive victory to encourage and empower us to press through the next conflict with the confidence that on the other side, we will be closer and more in love with each other!

Before the next time we meet, use the questions and activities below to enhance your skills in resolving conflicts with each other. These are all helpful skills for you to develop so that you can resolve conflicts and stay relational with each other all the time!

Continue sharing Joy Stories

Before you start, use the checklist in the lesson to make sure your relational circuits are OFF. If you get a yes for any one of them, use the list in the lesson on how to turn your RCs ON again.

Here are some guidelines for preparing to tell your story:

- 1) The story has a moderate feeling level and is not too intense.
- 2) The story is about me and I am involved in the story
- 3) Show genuine emotions on your face and in your voice when telling the story
- 4) Keep eye contact with your spouse while telling the story
- 5) Include words for your emotions
- 6) Describe what your body felt like
- 7) Describe appreciation so that your spouse knows how it feels

After each one shares their joy story, talk about how that made you feel listening or sharing your story and ask some questions about the story that might add some more joyful memories.

Express Appreciation to your spouse

Sit face to face with your knees touching. Take each other's hands and look into your spouse's eyes. Tell them something that you appreciate about what they have done for you recently. Give your spouse a big hug and kiss when you're done!

Joy Smiles

Take time during the day to look at your spouse and give them a great big smile that tells them how much you love and appreciate them. Be creative and see how many different ways you can smile at your spouse. It's OK to be a little silly or funny with this! Try to catch the other person when they are not expecting you to give them a joy smile. Laughter is a great way to keep you RCs on and stay connected.

Do some short encouragement times?

These can also help you actively listen – a first step in communication. The following are some guidelines to help you get started:

1. Meet in a place where you won't be interrupted.
2. Sit facing each other, close enough to hold hands.
3. One partner begins by saying: "The most positive thing that happened today was..." "Something I appreciated about you today was..." "Something about you I enjoy is..."
Take up to five minutes.
4. The listening partner maintains eye contact to show attentiveness and never interrupts. Then the listening partner feeds back what he or she heard and the feelings expressed without challenging them.
5. Switch roles and repeat the process.

Make a list of 10 things your partner can do that will make you feel loved.

- Be specific, positive, and unrelated to any conflicts you have had. Example: "Take a 10-minute walk with me." "Call me and tell me you love me."
- Exchange lists and *try to do two things from your partner's list each day*
- As partners learn to affirm each other, there will be an increase in the positive feelings you both have about each other and your relationship.
- **Affirming your love and commitment to each other** will strengthen your relationship against the times of conflicts.

Shalom Your Body

Go to the Jim Wilder YouTube video where he demonstrates how to quiet your body.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X87kwXYiMY0>

Check up on how you feel before you start.

Then do all of the ways to quiet your body and see how you feel after doing that.

Talks about how doing the exercises made you feel.