

HOW TO DEAL AND DE-ESCALATE CONFLICTS IN MARRIAGE

What are some of the common causes of conflicts in marriage? (Discuss)

Financial problems

Infidelity

The way they were brought up may be much different

They don't value the marriage

They don't think, marriage is a permanent commitment

Lack of sexual satisfaction

If one or both partners don't respect one another

When they don't trust each other

If one or both partners are too selfish

If one or both partners are too possessive

When one or both don't respect their partner's family members

If one or both carry ego

If they don't care for each other

If they don't love each other

If one or both blame each other

If they lack communication

If they are absolutely not compatible with each other

If they don't allot time for spending time together

If one or both fail to attract each other

Before Conflict Arises

Question: What happens when we allow conflicts to exist for long periods?

Question: Are there ways to avoid conflicts in marriage? Discuss and give examples about personal experiences and how conflicts are avoided.

A. RUNNING FROM IT

"The best place to start dealing with conflict is before a conflict arises. That's right, BEFORE a conflict arises. Every couple has their own combination of attitudes, emotions, and circumstances that set them up for conflict, but most couples are totally unaware of what they are. As you begin to identify the factors that precede your most frequent conflicts, you will discover a gold mine of insights to help you deal more effectively with those conflicts once they arise." (Gary and Carrie Oliver *"MAD About US"*)

Regardless of the severity of conflict, we've found that constructive conflict management is always easier when you have a plan. Over the years, the following seven steps have helped many couples turn conflict from something they feared to an opportunity to increase understanding and intimacy.

STEP 1: Define the Issue, Pray, Listen, and Seek Understanding. ...Remember this: You will NEVER resolve what you don't understand. Human nature dictates that it is virtually impossible to accept advice (let alone criticism) from someone unless you feel that they are trying to understand you. If you want your spouse to understand you, the starting place is for you to take the initiative in understanding them. Answering the following questions will help you better understand and define the issue. *Whose issue is it? What kind of issue is it? Is there more than one issue involved?*

Most people have spent hours engaged in conflicts that involved several issues. It's hard enough to manage one issue. It's almost impossible to deal with several issues at the same time. If there is more than one issue, decide which is most urgent. *Which is most important? What order should we take them in?* If you can't agree,

then choose the least volatile issue first. If you can't agree on that, then just flip a coin. Yes, that may sound silly, but we've been flipping coins for years and it works.

What is my spouse's core concern? A critical part of defining an issue is to take time to understand the heart and the perspective of your spouse. In fact, this may be one of the greatest contributions healthy conflict makes to the growth of intimacy in a marriage. The Bible has a lot to say about the power of seeking understanding. [Proverbs 4:7](#) says "Though it cost you all you have, get understanding."

Listening is one of the most powerful intimacy builders in any relationship because listening leads to understanding. That's why James exhorts us to "be quick to listen, slow to speak" ([James 1:19](#)). When you choose to listen to another person, you are saying that you value them and their concerns and that they are worth taking the time to understand. An open ear is the sure sign of an open heart.

...What is my core concern? After you've chosen to listen, hear, and understand your spouse, it will be important for you to identify and clarify your own core concern. ...Once you define the problem, and before going further, commit this specific conflict —as well as your desire to deal with conflict in a healthier and more mature manner —to God in prayer. In [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#), we're encouraged to "pray without ceasing."

STEP 2: How Important is it? Is it a High-ticket or a Low-ticket item? Once you have defined the issue, the next step is to determine just how important it is. Many of the conflicts in marriage can be traced to personal idiosyncrasies, minor annoyances, or passing irritations. Researchers tell us that only 31 percent of a couple's major continuing disagreements are about issues that they will be able to resolve. The rest, 69 percent, are about irresolvable perpetual problems —that is, fundamental differences in personalities or basic needs — that will never get resolved but that we need to learn how to manage and deal with.

Some differences demand confrontation, while others are simply a part of living with someone else. We all have our frustrating annoyances and so do our spouses. It's just that ours seem so much less weird than theirs. Before you allow an issue to consume too much of your time, ask yourself, "*How important is this?*"

STEP 3: Ask Yourself: "What is My Contribution to the Problem?" It's amazing that whenever there is a conflict we usually have little difficulty identifying our spouse's contribution to the problem, but we can be substantially blinded to our own. It's fascinating how very clear many of us can be about how "they" need to change, what "they" could do differently, and how "they" could listen better.

...Proverbs 25:12 (TLB) tells us, "It is a badge of honor to accept valid criticism." Those are sound words. Listen to what the other person has to say. Even if 90 percent of what they are saying is invalid, look for the 10 percent that might be true. Look for even the 1 percent that God could use in your life to help you deepen and mature into a mature Christlike woman or man.

STEP 4: Do I Need to Apologize or Ask for Forgiveness? As you think and pray through the third step you may become aware of something you have done that you need to apologize or ask forgiveness for. Early in our marriage I learned I could be right, but go about being right in a wrong or an unhealthy way. In the intensity of an emotional discussion it's easy to say things or do things or express ourselves in a tone of voice that discounts and wounds our partner. Over the next few years I discovered that there were some things I needed to apologize for. My intentions had been good, but my words had wounded the person I loved the most.

STEP 5: Choose Radical Responsibility. Radical responsibility is our way of saying that we need to take personal responsibility to choose what we can do differently and not wait around for our spouse to do something different. It means that we make a unilateral decision, regardless of what our spouse chooses to say or do, to seek wisdom and understanding in dealing with conflict. Regardless of the habits you saw growing up and those that may have characterized you for most of your life, you can teach yourself to take radical responsibility to listen, to understand, to accept, to be kind, to be patient, to forgive, and to love even when your partner may not be making that same choice. In fact, we are most like our Lord Jesus Christ when we love in this kind of situation.

STEP 6: Choose What You Both Can Do Differently. At this point you are working on identifying a mutually acceptable solution. ...Be sure to set aside ample time for discussion and prayer. Find a quiet place with no interruptions. Take the phone off the hook. Remember that this step involves choosing to bargain some of

your personal needs for some of your relationship needs. Many couples have found it helpful to read 1 Corinthians 13 aloud before entering into the discussion.

STEP 7: PRAY ABOUT IT, DO IT, AND REVIEW IT!

We pray this has been helpful for you. Even if your spouse won't approach conflict in a healthy way, we hope that you will ask the Lord to show you how you can personally grow in this area of your marriage as one who exemplifies the attitude and actions of Jesus Christ our Lord.

B. Confronting it (Fighting Fair)

"How you argue —especially how you end an argument —can determine the long-term success or failure of your relationship. A primary requirement for all fights is to maintain control. You don't have the license to be childish, abusive or immature. If you have legitimate feelings, you're entitled to give a reasonable voice to those feelings in a constructive way." (*Dr Phil McGraw*)

To help you "give a reasonable voice" to that which you feel is important to express to your spouse, we want to share with you some practical advice that was given on the Dr Phil (television) Show (Feb. 25, 2003) titled "[Fighting Fair](#)." Here are Dr. Phil's specific rules for "[How to Fight Fair](#)":

- **Take it private and keep it private.** Fighting in front of your children is nothing short of child abuse. It can and will scar them emotionally —all because you don't have the self-control to contain yourself until you can talk privately.
- **Keep it relevant.** Don't bring up old grudges or sore points when they don't belong in a particular argument. Put boundaries down around the subject matter so that a fight doesn't deteriorate into a free-for-all.
- **Keep it real.** Deal with what really is at issue, not with a symptom of the problem. Get real about what's bothering you, or you'll come away from the exchange even more frustrated.
- **Avoid character assassination.** Stay focused on the issue, rather than deteriorating to the point of attacking your partner personally. Don't let the fight degenerate into name-calling.
- **Remain task-oriented.** Know what you want going into the disagreement. If you don't have a goal in mind, you won't know when you've achieved it.
- **Allow for your partner to retreat with dignity.** How an argument ends is crucial. Recognize when an olive branch is being extended to you (perhaps in the form of an apology or a joke), and give your partner a face-saving way out of the disagreement.
- **Be proportional in your intensity.** Every single thing you disagree about isn't an earth-shattering event or issue. You don't have to get mad every time you have a right to be. When you fight about everything you're fighting about nothing.
- **There's a time limit.** Arguments should be temporary, so don't let them get out of hand. Don't allow the ugliness of an argument to stretch on indefinitely.

RESOLVING CONFLICT GUIDELINES – With Scriptures

Read through each guideline and the corresponding Bible verses and discuss as a married couple if they would be good to use to set boundaries that you can and should live by whenever you encounter points of tension you need to resolve with each other. You can then put together your own guidelines that will best suit your needs.

We will start by praying together for tender hearts and wisdom—committing to come together in a spirit of humility and reconciliation —considering the health of our marriage as more important than our individual interests.

Psalm 139:23-24 — Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

Proverbs 2:1-5 — My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for

understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 3:7 — Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

Proverbs 11:2 — When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Proverbs 16:18 — Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 26:12 — Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Philippians 2:3-4 — Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

James 3:17-18 — Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

1 Peter 1:13 — Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

We commit to handle ourselves with maturity —being quick to listen and slow to speak —reaching for the goal of continually trying to better understand each other.

James 1:19 — My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Proverbs 1:5 — Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.

Proverbs 10:8 — The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

Proverbs 15:18 — A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Proverbs 15:28 — The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.

Proverbs 16:23 — A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.

Proverbs 18:13 — He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.

Proverbs 18:17 — The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.

Proverbs 29:20 — Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

1 Corinthians 13:11 — When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

1 Corinthians 14:20 — Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

We will speak the truth in love —respectfully honoring each other's feelings.

Proverbs 16:23 — A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.

Proverbs 10:29 — The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.

Proverbs 12:18 — Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 17:27 — A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.

Proverbs 18:2 — A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.

Ephesians 4:15 — Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is that Head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:29 — Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

We won't allow our discussion to escalate into yelling or name-calling. And we will refrain from provoking each other by delivering "cheap shots" —sarcasm, innuendos, and rudeness which complicates the issues. If that happens we'll call for a time-out and come back together at an agreed upon time.

Proverbs 4:24 — Put away perversity from your mouth keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

Proverbs 13:3 — He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

Proverbs 8:7-8 — My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All of the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse.

Proverbs 18:21 — The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 29:11 — A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

1 Corinthians 13:5 — Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs.

Galatians 5:15 — If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Ephesians 4:26, 31 — In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

1 Peter 2:11 — Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

Titus 3:2 — Remind the people to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

We commit to MEAN what we say —so neither one of us is put into the position of being expected to read the other person's mind.

Proverbs 11:3 — The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

Proverbs 21:28 — A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever.

Proverbs 24:26 — An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.

Matthew 5:37 — Simply let your "Yes" be "Yes", and your "No," "No"; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

James 5:12 — Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no or you will be condemned.

We will stick to the subject on hand —not allowing our discussion to sidetrack onto any other grievance at this time. (Other issues can be dealt with at another time.)

1 Corinthians 14:40 — Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Proverbs 4:25-26 — Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you.

Proverbs 4:27a — Do not swerve to the right or the left.

1 Peter 4:7 — The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

We will avoid using "never" and "always" statements —seeking to be accurate, truthful, and realistic in what we say.

Proverbs 11:1 — The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.

Proverbs 21:23 — He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

We will work not to judge each other—but rather seek to express our own feelings over the matter.

We will speak to each other in "I feel" statements (explaining our own perspective) rather than in "you" statements pointed at our spouse accusing them of feelings they may or may not have. (An example of this would be: "I feel lonely when you're gone so much," rather than "You never come home.")

Proverbs 15:28 — The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.

Matthew 7:1-2 — Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

We will refrain from playing the "blame game"—and will each look for the plank in our own eye—rather than the speck in our spouse's.

Proverbs 16:2 — All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

Proverbs 21:2 — All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart.

Proverbs 19:3 — It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

Matthew 7:1-5 — Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother; "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

1 Peter 3:8 — Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

We will readily apologize and sincerely ask for forgiveness for whatever way that we have hurt our spouse and for whatever tension we've caused in our marital relationship by our behavior.

Matthew 5:23 — If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 6:14 — For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Luke 17:3-4 — If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent," forgive him.

We will work to forgive each other as Christ has forgiven us — never again reminding our spouse of the pain for which we've said we've forgiven them. And we'll make daily choices not to dwell on those painful thoughts in the future.

Matthew 5:9 — Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Romans 12:18 — If it is possible as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 14:19 — Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

2 Corinthians 10:5 — We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Ephesians 4:32 — Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 — Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Hebrews 12:14-15 — Make every effort to live in peace with all men to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

1 Peter 5:16 — Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. We will end our time together in prayer giving thanks for what we've learned about our relationship with each other. We will each ask God to bless our spouse and help us to be a blessing to them knowing that is our mission because of our marriage vows.

Proverbs 16:3 — Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

Philippians 1:9-10 — And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.

Colossians 3:15 — Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Hebrews 13:20 — May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 — Therefore encourage one another and build each other up.

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 — Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

James 5:16 — Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

1 Peter 3:8-9 — Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

The above guidelines came to us from various sources, some suggested, some our own, and some from other sources that had no authors attached (so we can't give proper credit to them). We pray they will help you work to resolve your own relational conflicts within your marriage.

Rules for Resolving Conflict

Rules can protect us from ourselves and our natural inclination to do that which will cause the destruction of a family or a marriage. But why do we hesitate to put rules or guidelines into place to help us slow our tempers down so we resolve conflict in healthier ways — ways that reflect God’s heart? After-all, we’re told in the Bible:

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” ([Ephesians 4:30-32](#)).

You HAVE to know that God’s heart is grieving when you fight with each other in ways that are so divisive and ungodly — let alone the horrible testimony that is being lived out as the world looks on. As Jesus said, **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” ([John 13:34-35](#)).**

Put together whatever rules and guidelines you can to help. Tape them on the refrigerator, a mirror, a wall, or wherever, until they are ingrained in the way you treat each other when you work out your conflicts with each other.

GUIDELINES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

- “Discuss the Conflict as soon as possible. The old proverb, ‘time heals all wounds’ does not apply to conflicts in marriage. But the modern-day saying, ‘timing is everything’ does. When an irritating issue is unresolved, it builds emotional distance between you and your spouse. And just like a splinter, the issue gets under your skin and continues to fester until it is dealt with.

“When your spouse’s behavior bothers you, make a decision to confront your mate as soon as possible. If the issue needs your undivided attention, choose a time when no one else is around — even if you have to ask for a few minutes alone together.” (*Simon Presland, from the article [“How to Fight Fair”](#)*)

- **“Take it Private and Keep it Private. Fighting in front of your children is nothing short of child abuse. It can and will scar them emotionally — all because you don’t have the self-control to contain yourself until you can talk privately.” (*Dr Phil McGraw, “How to Fight Fair”*)**

- **“Avoid Personal Insults or Character Assassination. ‘Attacking your mate’s character is the best way to make an enemy for life’, says Pastor Luke. ‘To avoid this, it is important to see the issue as the problem —not your spouse. This is how God deals with us. He tells us of his infinite acceptance, yet confronts us on issues that do not line up with his word.’**

“Stay focused on the issue at hand. This will help you remain objective and express your thoughts clearly without alienating your spouse through personal attacks.” (*Simon Presland, [“How to Fight Fair”](#)*)

“Remind the people... to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men” ([Titus 3:2](#)).

“If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” ([Galatians 5:15](#)).

- **Sometimes it’s Best to Take a “Time Out.” “Agree ahead of time to allow for a temporary ‘time out’ if either of you becomes too angry to continue.” (*Mart DeHaan, from RBC article [“Rules for Fair Fighting”](#)*)**

“Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city” ([Proverbs 16:32](#)).

“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control”([Proverbs 29:11](#)).

- **“Keep it Relevant. Don’t bring up old grudges or sore points when they don’t belong in a particular argument.” (*Dr Phil McGraw, [“How to Fight Fair”](#)*)**

“In many marriages, confronting an issue is the gunpowder that ignites World War 3. Defenses kick in.

Accusations fly. And by the time the smoke has cleared, spouses have bombed each other with everything that has happened since the day they were married.

“When you decide to face an issue, don’t allow yourself — or your mate — to drag in past hurts. Deal with one issue at a time. Make a rule between yourselves that if neither is willing to discuss a sore point as soon as it happens, then the issue cannot be used as ammunition for future fights.” (*Simon Presland, from article [“How to Fight Fair”](#)*)

• **Build Relationship Bridges, Not Walls.** “The goal of any disagreement should be to understand each other’s feelings and strive toward an amiable compromise. With that goal in mind, let’s consider ... Below-the-belt Tactics to Avoid:

1. Dragging others into the argument (‘Well, my mom says...’)
2. Giving the silent treatment
3. Yelling or crying to get your way
4. Spewing destructive criticism (‘You suck the joy out of everything!’)
5. Using sarcasm
6. Issuing threats and ultimatums
7. Getting defensive
8. Using buzz words (always, never, hate, divorce)
9. Expecting him [or her] to read your mind.” (*Shannon Ethridge, “Fighting Fair”*)

• **“Confront to Heal, Not to Win.** Some people view conflict and confrontation as a win-lose situation. These spouses see being right as far more important than the marital relationship. But working out a hurtful issue is not about who’s right and who’s wrong. Your goal should be not to win, but to confront a conflict and restore the harmony in your relationship.

“Whenever possible, the solution to a problem should benefit both parties. When both spouses feel good about a resolution, it will reestablish the emotional bond between the two of you. Confronting to heal instead of to win will keep your marriage on healthy ground.” (*Simon Presland, “How to Fight Fair”*)

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” ([Romans 14:19](#)).

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry for a man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” ([James 1:19-20](#))

“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” ([Ephesians 4:1-3](#))

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” ([Philippians 1:27](#)).

Planning a Peace Conference

As it was once said, “We live in perilous times” — no one can deny that no matter where you live in the world. Unfortunately that can be said within a lot of marriages as well. Many of them become staging areas for dramatic and traumatic battles between husbands and wives, exploding into “unfair” fighting causing all kinds of destruction.

If you and your spouse do not resolve your marital conflicts (which we ALL have at different times) in ways that are healthy, then we encourage you to PLAN A PEACE CONFERENCE. Your spouse is not supposed to be treated as your enemy, no matter what she or he does. The Bible says, “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” ([1 Peter 3:9](#)). We’re told in the Bible, “If it is possible, AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, live at peace with everyone” ([Romans 12:18](#)). So do what you can, with God’s help, to find a way to be a peacemaker within your home. That doesn’t mean that you can never say anything negative to your spouse, it just means that you’re careful and prayerful in what you say and the timing of it all.

• **Approach your spouse for this “conference” at a time other than a “H.A.L.T.” time.** But basically, it’s refraining from approaching your spouse with serious discussion issues during times when he or she is Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired.

If your spouse isn’t ready to talk at that time:

- “Schedule a mutually agreeable ‘appointment’ to discuss what’s bothering you. This takes initiative, but a face-to-face meeting is critical if you hope to resolve your differences.”
- **Be considerate of your children, when you work out your disagreements.** As “Make your children a priority. Realize that your children are adversely affected by your marital problems. Make the time to listen to them express their thoughts and feelings on a regular basis. Be honest with them and acknowledge the problems that exist in your marriage, but don’t disparage your spouse unnecessarily. Admit the facts, but don’t try to

turn your children against your spouse. Provide as much stability as you can for them, and meet their needs. Don't depend on your children to meet your own needs, but seek to meet their needs with God's help" (*Karla Downing*)

- **Don't involve others in your disagreements.** It's a good idea to **S.T.O.P.** (**See The Other People**) so you don't embarrass them and your spouse. • **"Make sure there is only one issue and that both of you are discussing that same issue.** Sounds simple, right? But most couples don't define their issues, so they end up arguing about different issues when they think they're talking about the same thing." (You can talk about other issues at other times.) (*Gary Oliver, From the Marriage Partnership article, "[Healthy Conflict?](#)"*)

- Beware of contaminating your Peace Conference with Relationship Germs.

"There are four reasons—I call them relationship germs—that cause more than 90 percent of divorce in America: **withdrawing, escalating, belittling, and developing negative beliefs.** They all have to do with negotiating your differences. All four of those relationship germs produce anger. So if you monitor anger every day, and clear it up, you stay emotionally out of the dark and more connected with each other" (from the article *Marriage Partnership* article, "[Handling Hidden Differences](#)").

- **You may need to call a "Truce" at some point,** which basically is a type of "time out" for both of you to calm down and condense these disagreement times into shorter segments. But Truce times are NOT set so you can entirely avoid or evade the subject. It is another tool to help you resolve your differences in healthy ways.

- **Be willing to flex and yield to your partner at times.** Scripture says, "Wisdom... is peace-loving and courteous. It allows discussion and is willing to yield to others; it's full of mercy and good deeds. It's wholehearted and straightforward and sincere" (*James 3:17, TLB*).

- **Don't to forget to treat each other with respect and honor.** As the Bible says, "Honor one another above yourselves" (*Romans 12:10*). We can't emphasize that enough! I don't know why it is, but so often after marriage (and sometimes before) we seem to go into a brain freeze where we forget to treat each other with honor, as God tells us to do. When we remember to honor each other above ourselves all the points mentioned above naturally occurs as a result.

"We come to love not by finding a perfect person but by learning to see an imperfect person perfectly" (*Sam Keen*).

Conclusion

It's our prayer that together we will get serious about holding "Peace Conferences" in our marriages rather than fights and making our marriages into war zones. May God help each of us to reflect the heart of Christ in every aspect of our marriages!

1. Remember not to sweat the small stuff.
2. Practice acceptance.
3. Exercise patience.
4. Lower your expectations.
5. Remember you both desire harmony.
6. Focus on the behavior of the person and not their personal characteristics.
7. Clarify what the person meant by their action, instead of what you perceived their action to mean.
8. Keep in mind your objective is to solve the problem, rather than win the fight.
9. Accept the other person's response.
10. Leave it in the past.