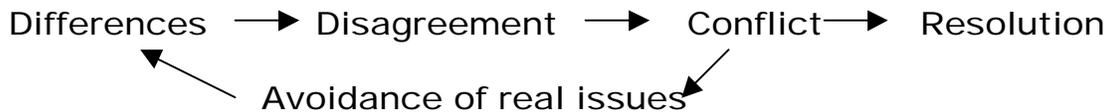
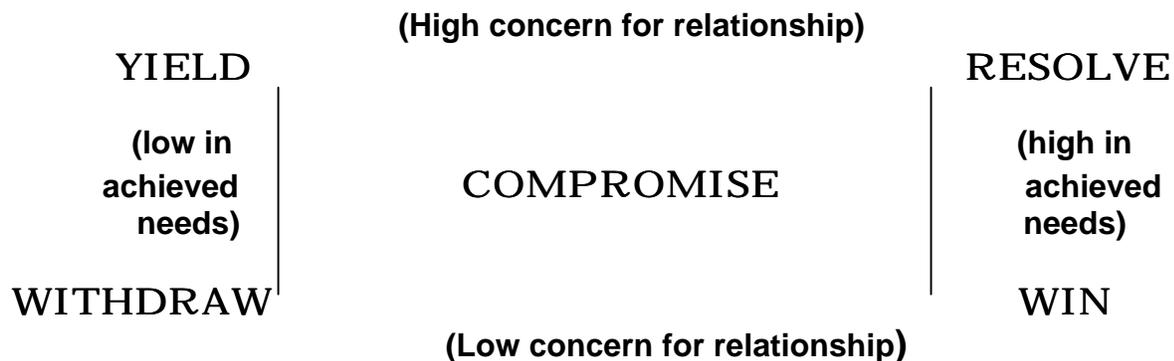


# Marital Conflicts:

Conflicts between married people are not necessarily destructive. Rightly used, they provide valuable clues that show us the growing edges of our relationship - the points at which we need to work together to make it richer and deeper. Conflict is very natural because we are unique and different individuals with different tastes, habits, likes and dislikes, values and standards. As we progress deeper into our relationships, it is inevitable that opinions, feelings and wants will clash. Conflict becomes destructive when our "weapons" are turned upon each other instead of on the problem or issue. If we ignore or suppress these issues, it may just set the stage for a painful explosion of built up anger. Pride, selfishness, suspicions and confusion or matters left unresolved from our pasts all enter into conflict. There is always risk in confrontation and love, but sometimes it is necessary for a healthy growing relationship. Learn to recognize and improve your individual patterns of conflict.



## THE FIVE STYLES OF CONFLICT:



1. **Withdrawal:** may be physically or psychological.
2. **Winning:** the goal no matter what the cost.
3. **Yielding:** giving in, being the loser or martyr
4. **Compromise:** give a little, get a little, bargaining
5. **Resolve:** spending time through communication in resolving a conflict to a mutually agreeable solution.

Of these, **compromise** and **resolution** accomplish the most for a relationship. The other three styles may fail to come to grip with the real issues and only postpone the conflict. But in a relationship each style has its proper time and place.

## Why Making Up is so sweet!!

There is a constructive side to marital conflicts. They open up doors to communication and increased intimacy, if that door is not kept closed, or slammed shut, or bolted and locked. They help us to get to know ourselves, and see and face ourselves as we are, teaching us humility and offering possibilities for confession and forgiveness. They help us to move to deeper levels – revealing needs not being met, feelings needing healing, and they can help us develop ways to meet those needs and heal those hurt feelings. Conflict used correctly can break down walls between us, get behind the symptoms to the real issues, and provide alternative solutions for solving problems. It also gives us opportunities to show and express and reinforce our concern, love, and care for each other and affirm our commitment to one another. Making up is so sweet because we have "cleared the air" of the relationship – releasing all those built up tensions and the painful feelings that were keeping us apart.

## SOME IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF HANDLING CONFLICT ARE:

**Choose the right time and place, establish ground rules** for "fair fighting" and never go to bed angry! Putting off a conflict only makes it more emotional and increases the tension. Putting off minor matters now, may produce a major explosion later. Avoid times of exhaustion or physical distresses.

**Learn to listen:** Give your spouse your complete attention, and patiently hear them out, then before answering them, restate what you have "heard" the other person saying (verbally and non-verbally) and give them opportunity to correct your "understanding" of what you heard them say. This is called **active listening**. It is important we state clearly what we mean, and avoid confusion of the issues. Don't beat around the bush or play "games".

**Document descriptively** by stating what you see happening in the conflict: name your feelings, use metaphors, similes and appropriate figures of speech, and express verbally what you feel like doing.

**Learn to "own" the problem** – Identify your contributions by recognizing that in every conflict part of the problem is yours - and you must accept and deal with that. Focus on why you are angry instead of your spouse's anger.

**Use "I" messages** rather than **"You" messages**, stating what you feel, need or want rather than making accusations and pronouncing judgments that damage the other's self-esteem and the relationship. Speak just for yourself - beware of "you" messages disguised as "I" or "we" messages. "I" messages put your own emotional "cards" on the table:

*"I feel (feeling) when (description of problem) because it (tangible effects on me)":*

*For example: "I feel hurt when you forget to kiss me good-bye because it makes me feel unloved and taken for granted."*

**Deal with Facts**, then **Feelings**, and then **Needs**. Suggest appropriate responses you are willing to undertake, and ask for your partners' opinions, observations and suggestions.

Even when there are conflicts, **never withhold physical intimacy** from your spouse, or try to use it to manipulate. (I Cor 7:5) And respect your partner's vulnerability in such situations.

Sometimes recurring conflicts require a "pre-solution". When a pattern of repeated friction develops, and destructive tendencies are becoming apparent - a couple ought to analyze the causes (which may be due to differences in temperament or sources differing from the issues) outside of the heat of "battle" and affirm together **a plan of action in advance for the next time** around.

There is also a "post-solution:" **confession, forgiveness and reconciliation**. Love is being able to say, "I am wrong! I am sorry! Please forgive me!" And love can also chose to forgive – making the deliberate decision to not raise the issue or matter again. We are commanded to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us, and to be reconciled to one another.

### Conflict Escalations:

**Differences of Opinion**  
**Heated Debate or Argument**  
**Intense Anger Expressed**  
**Hostility Confirmed**

**"Spat"**  
**"Quarrel"**  
**"Fight"**  
**"War"**

**Confrontation**  
**Division**  
**Rejection**  
**Separation**

# The "Don'ts" of Marital Warfare:

1. Don't avoid conflict with "the silent treatment!"
2. Don't save up emotional trading stamps!
3. Don't strike while the Iron is "hot" --- at wrong time or place!
4. Don't attack your mate, rather attack the problem!
5. Don't throw your feelings like stones or "hit below the belt."
6. Don't get off the topic or drag in other issues – clarify the real problems.
7. Don't criticize without offering solutions.
8. Don't tell people what they feel or think or "should" feel or think.
9. Never say "You never. . ." or use sarcasm, exaggerations & hysterical statements.
10. Never manipulate each other, resort to name calling, or verbal power plays!
11. Don't use "mercenaries" – dragging in third parties – keep things private.
12. Never let pride take over – you just may be wrong!!

## Steps toward the Resolution of a Conflict

1. **ASK YOUR PARTNER TO DISCUSS A DIFFERENCE.** In order to get off to a good start, both of you need to agree to talk; when, where and how long to talk; and what the difference is that is under discussion.
2. **EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS.** Listen to yourself, identifying what you feel and acknowledging those as your feelings. Look behind angry feelings for feelings of hurt or fear that often precede anger. Risk expressing those feelings to your partner. Listen attentively to your partner's feelings, accepting and seeking to understand them.
3. **IDENTIFY THE REAL ISSUE.** Beneath the difference that triggered your first feelings may lie another need involving important personal needs. See if you can identify the needs you each have that are being blocked or unmet. Attempt to clarify the issue between you in light of these underlying needs.
4. **STAY IN THE HERE AND NOW.** Don't drag up the past. You can't change what has been done before, work on the present. (Long withheld feelings need to be expressed at an appropriate time, but not in the midst of resolving a present conflict.)
5. **SPECIFY WHERE YOU AGREE.** Find something that each of you can agree with in the other's side of the difference. Summarize what you both hold in common about the issue.
6. **NEGOTIATE THE ISSUE.** Brainstorm various alternative solutions to the difference. Evaluate them in light of their potential for meeting your identified conflict: agree to implement one or a combination of preferred solutions.
7. **CLOSE THE DISCUSSION.** Signify to each other by word or touch that you are concluding the discussion. You may either celebrate the resolution or agree to continue to explore the issue at another time. Pray together, asking God's forgiveness for your anger and His help in reconciling your hearts.
8. **IF AFTER DISCUSSION, SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES REMAIN,** you may agree to disagree; or offer to give the other what they want as a free gift (remember gracious receiving is as important at gracious giving); or meet in the middle with a compromise. Sometimes temporary solutions are necessary.

1. List eight minor or subtle differences between the ways you and your partner think, believe or do things. Then go back and check those differences which have contributed or created conflicts.

2. Using the diagram on the **Five Styles of Conflict**, reflect on several of your recent marital “conflicts.” Write out your reflections on each on a separate sheet of paper.

Explore the causes, the way each conflict began, unfolded, and was dealt with, and how (or if) it was resolved. To what extent were you responsible for conflict?

Was the real issue addressed or just the symptoms?

What mistakes did you make: wrong time or place, failure to listen, dragging in other issues, etc.?  
(Compare with the list of Don't s)

What did you learn about yourself during or as a result of that conflict?

3. Looking at the Conflict diagram, which styles do you tend to use most of the time? Your Spouse?

4. If you could change the manner in which you and your spouse handle conflicts, what would you change?

5. What is one conflict area that you would like to see resolved at the present time, and one you would be willing to discuss with your spouse this week?

6. Have you written out a set of Rules for Conflict for your marriage?

# What Does the Bible say about Conflict?

**James 4:1-3** What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

**Ephesians 4: 25-37** Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. 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. And 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.

**James 1:19–20:** My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

On Quarreling and strife: **Prov. 3:30; 15:18; 17:14, 19; 18:6; 20:3; 2 Tim 2:14, 24; Phil 2:3**

Dissension: **Prov. 6:14, 19; 10:12; 15:18; 29:22**

On Anger: **Psalm 37:8; Prov. 14:17, 29; 16:32; 19:11; 29:1; Gal 5:19-20; Col 3:8**

## WWJD? How did Jesus handle these conflicts?

Mark 3:1-11

John 8:1-11

Matthew 15:1-9

John 11:45-57

Mark 11:11-19

{Sources for material for Conflict pages from: *Communication: Key to your Marriage* and *The Pillars of Marriage* by Norman Wright; *Making Love Last Forever* by Gary Smalley, *Magnificent Marriage* by Gordon MacDonald and a handout by Boni Piper.]