

Preparation for Marriage Manual

Part 10 – Conflict in the Marriage Relationship

Are you anticipating conflict in your marriage relationship?

If not, you will be in for a painful surprise.

Conflict is a fact of life.

Why is this?

The answer is simply that we are human beings, imperfect people, and each of us has our own desires, wants, needs and goals.

Whenever any of these differ from those of our partner, conflict may occur.

In the intimate relationship of a marriage differing beliefs, ideas, attitudes, feeling and behaviour will be the fuse that causes conflict to explode.

The conflicts themselves are **not** the real problem, but rather our reaction to them.

Many times disagreements or conflicts do not need to be completely resolved.

For example, a disagreement over political philosophy. This type of disagreement could continue indefinitely and need not destroy the overall marriage relationship.

1. List some of the issues you and your future partner disagree on that do **not** need to be completely resolved.

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2. What does “*completely resolved*” mean to you?

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3. Make a list of some issues on which you and your future partner disagree that **do** need solutions. Those on which more time needs to be spent exploring alternatives.

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4. Select one of the issues listed above, write an explanation of the situation, as you see it.

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5. Some people have learned to use weapons in dealing with conflicts. What are some unfair weapons?

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6. What effect does anger have upon a solution to conflict?

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Remember that anger comes about for three basic reasons; hurt, fear and frustration.

What do the following verses have to say about the right way to handle anger, in yourself and your future partner?

Psalm 37:1-11
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Proverbs 14:29
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Proverbs 15:1
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Proverbs 15:28
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Proverbs 16:32
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Proverbs 19:11
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Proverbs 25:28
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Proverbs 29:11
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Matthew 5:43-44
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Romans 8:28-29
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Romans 12:19, 21
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Galatians 5:16-23
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Ephesians 4:26
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Ephesians 4:29
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Ephesians 4:32
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1 Peter 3:9
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What causes conflicts?
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James 4:1-3 [NIV] *“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.”*

Your thoughts and comments

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Now let us be very specific and look at one incident of conflict that you and your future partner have recently experienced.

- 1. Describe this recent or current conflict.

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2. What do you believe caused the conflict? What was the outcome? What if anything did it accomplish?

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3. How did you create or contribute to the conflict?

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Remember conflict is a natural part of life. Conflict can be used to either destroy or mature a marriage relationship.

Most people do not deal openly with conflict because no-one has ever taught them an effective way of dealing with conflicts.

James Fairfield in his book *'When You Don't Agree'* lists choices we have in dealing with conflicts.

Five different styles of dealing with conflict:

Withdraw

If we have a tendency to view the conflict as hopeless inevitably which we can do little to control, we may not even try. We may withdraw physically by leaving the scene of the conflict or we may leave mentally, we *"switch off"*.

Win

If we feel we must always look after our own interests or our self-concept is threatened in a conflict we may choose to win, no matter the cost. Domination is usually reflected in this style, personal relationships take second place.

Yield

"Giving in to get along" is another style. We don't like what is happening, but rather than risk additional conflict and confrontation we choose this path.

Compromise

"Give a little to get a little" is another style. We may find that it is important to give up on some of our demands or ideas in order to encourage our partner to give a little. We don't want to win all the time nor do we want our partner to win all the time.

Resolve

We may choose to do all we can to resolve the conflict. In this style of dealing with conflicts the situation, attitude or behaviour is changed as a result of open and direct communication.

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5. Describe a situation in which you yielded in a conflict.

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6. Describe a situation in which you compromised from a conflict.

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7. Describe a situation in which you were able to resolve a conflict.

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8. Describe how each solution affected the feelings of others towards you.

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Won

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Yielded

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Compromised

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Resolved

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9. How did you feel about yourself in each situation?

Withdrew

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Won

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Yielded

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Compromised

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Resolved

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10. Did the result eventually bring about a more peaceful atmosphere in each case?

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Yielded

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Compromised

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Resolved

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What styles of handling conflict do we find in the Christian Bible?

Take a few minutes to study the following accounts of conflict.

Try to determine and write down the various styles you observe being used.

Genesis 4:1-16

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1 Samuel 20:30-34

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Matthew 15:10-20

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Mark 11:11-19

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Luke 23:18-49

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John 8:1-11

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John 11:11-19

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Which style do you think is best for a stable and happy marriage?

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Withdrawal

This style is least effective in resolving conflict because such a person is giving up on meeting the goals and developing the relationship. The relationship is turned off. Only if this style is used as a temporary cooling off step towards resolving the conflict is it of any real benefit.

There may be times when the discussion is so heated and out of control that withdrawing is the best move to take.

Win

The win style may achieve an end to the conflict but can also sacrifice the relationship. In a family, personal relationships are more important than reaching any personal goal.

Yielding

This style works in reverse to the win style in that the relationship may be maintained but the goal of resolving the crisis is sacrificed.

Compromise

This style attempts to work out some needs but the bargaining involved may mean that you have to compromise some of your own values.

Resolve

Naturally the highest value or style because in the final analysis relationships are strengthened as you seek to meet personal needs of both partners in the union.

Consider trying to apply the following principles taken from the Christian Bible.

Proverbs 18:13 [NIV] *“He who answers before listening, that is his folly and his shame.”*

When a conflict arises, instead of demanding that you be heard, listen carefully to your partner.

James 1:19 [NIV] *“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,”*

Any changes that one person desires to see in another must be heard and understood.

Proverbs 15:23 [Amplified] *“A man has joy in making an apt answer, and a word spoken at the right moment, how good it is.”*

Always select the appropriate time to seek to resolve a conflict.

Proverbs 15:28 [NIV] *“The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.”*

Define the reason for the conflict.

Psalms 133:1 [NIV] *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”*

Define the areas of agreement and disagreement in the conflict.

Romans 3:23 [NIV] *“There is no difference for all have sinned....”*

This is the difficult part. Few, if any, conflicts are just one-sided. Most involve contributions from both sides.

Identify your own contribution to the problem and admit it to your partner. When we do accept some responsibility for the problem, our partner sees a willingness in us to co-operate and will then be more open to the discussion.

As your partner shares their feeling, observations, and suggestions, avoid being defensive on your part.

Proverbs 13:18 [Living Bible] *“If you refuse criticism you will end up in poverty and disgrace, if you accept criticism you are on the road to fame.”*

Proverbs 23:12 [Living Bible] *“Don’t refuse to accept criticism, get all the help you can.”*

Proverbs 25:12 [Living Bible] *“It is a badge of honour to accept valid criticism.”*

Proverbs 28:13 [Living Bible] *“A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance.”*

Resolving conflicts will bind your partnership more closely and help both of you to mature.