



# Four Elements of Conflict Resolution

From FOUNDATIONS Newsletter

Having a successful marriage means learning some skills that differ from the skills you need for most other pieces of life. You are in the business of building, maintaining, and protecting a relationship. In many instances in our lives, we are protecting our own interests. In marriage, we sometimes have to put aside what might be our first choice in order to keep the relationship in good health.

## **1. Know the distinction between difference and disagreements.**

You can differ with your spouse without having a disagreement. You can vote for different presidential candidates, prefer different restaurants, or have different favorite movies. These differences do not necessarily impact your relationship, because you can act on your own to satisfy your preference. But if you differ about whether to live on the East or West coast; or if you differ over whether or not to buy a house, then it is hard to go forward without resolving that difference.

## **2. Differences become disagreements when space is limited.**

Since in marriage you join your lives and commit to staying together, then your choices of some basic issues become matters for joint decision-making. Not only is your physical space limited, but your psychic space is limited, too. How do you feel about having company on Saturday evening? How do you feel about cleaning up the house Saturday afternoon in order to have it ready for company Saturday evening? It's "our" decision, it's "our" company, and it's "our" space to make ready. We may have different needs for socializing, different desires for time use and different standards for tidiness, all of which have to be negotiated for this one event.

## **3. When disagreements heat up, they become conflicts.**

There is a bodily reaction that happens when you are in a conflict. Your pulse rises, your breathing speeds up, and you often get sweaty palms. Your body is sending adrenalin into your system, because it believes you are in danger. It is preparing you to fight.

This reaction happens faster in some people than others, but whenever it happens, it drives the ability to come to a reasonable solution right out of the picture. The fight instinct drives away the learned response to compromise every time. When you're ready to fight you cannot feel your love for your partner; therefore, the conflict takes place in a dangerous zone, without the caring that normally characterizes your interactions with one another.

At this point you must make a choice. Either you can resolve the conflict and come back together feeling good about each other and your relationship, or you can come away feeling embattled and resentful, and it will make your relationship more difficult, at least for a while.

## **4. Conflicts are resolved more easily when you can cool off first.**

Making the choice to back away from a fight until you can talk calmly – while taking a huge amount of discipline – can reap big benefits for your relationship. The only way to win an

argument in a marriage is for both partners to come away feeling that they were heard and respected.

**Helpful books:**

- *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman
- *The Other Side of Love: Handling Anger in a Godly Way*, Gary Chapman
- *You Don't Have to Take It Anymore: Turn Your Resentful, Angry, or Emotionally Abusive Relationship Into a Compassionate, Loving One*, Steven Stosny
- *Love and Anger in Marriage*, David Mace