

Collaborative Conflict Resolution and Maintenance

Conflicts in needs, values, styles, opinions, and cultures in each of the members of the relationship or family will invariably end up in conflict, misunderstanding, and often hurt and disillusionment. Bringing up and addressing these conflicts offers great opportunities for clients to let go of unreal expectations and learn more about the person with whom they are relating. As soon as someone is aware of a conflict, make time to address it and hopefully come to some agreements and learn about each other in the process. When the couple or members of the family make time and sit down to address the conflict, the following steps which are used by mediators and family therapists can be very useful.

1. The first step is to acknowledge the love and respect for each other and the desire to rid the relationship of behaviors which are getting in the way of intimacy or someone growing to their potential.
2. Each person, taking turns, verbalizes their resentments and other feelings. State the conflict as clearly as possible: "I get angry when you yell and criticize me" and "I get angry when you don't help me."
3. Each person listens to the others' feelings, reflecting or mirroring what they hear the other person saying and the feelings they must be experiencing; there must also be an acknowledgment of understanding of the other's feelings in light of what they are complaining about (Hendrix, 1988).
4. Both persons identify and voice their wants from the other after both persons have had an opportunity to verbalize their wants clearly: "I want you to appreciate what I do in to support you in household chores" and "I want you to wash the dishes when you see them stacked up in the sink."
5. Both persons brainstorm options for solving the conflict.
6. Both persons decide on a plan of action. "I will let you know when my after school activities will keep me from being able to take out the garbage and ask someone to take over that responsibility."

This process may need to repeat if the chosen option(s) continues to result in conflict. If the conflict is old and very emotionally charged, it is helpful to have an outside relationship therapist to facilitate the process. This is what often brings couples to marriage therapy for an opportunity to learn what to say good-bye to and what to welcome as the new hello.

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