

## BASIC RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

People respond to conflict in 5 ways: fighting, submitting, fleeing, freezing, and **communicating**.

All 5 responses are normal and we all engage in mild forms of these at some time. The first 4 are well intended but tend to be emotionally costly.

Unsuccessful responses to conflict resulting in pathologies.

**Fighting** : arguments, blaming, criticizing, shouting, paranoid thinking, physical & verbal violence

**Submitting** : low self esteem, guilt, negativity, depression

**Fleeing** : avoidance of discussion about problems, workaholism, drug/alcohol abuse, eating disorders

**Freezing** : anxiety, indecision, procrastination, panic attacks

## 5 ANGRY PARTNER RECIPROCAL INTERACTIONS

**Fight - Fight** : Both partners angrily try to coerce the other. One partner's anger intensifies the anger of the other. Arguments can escalate into verbal or physical violence. At some point, one or both partners hits an escalation ceiling and the pattern then shifts.

**Fight - Freeze**: One partner's anger triggers the other's inaction/indecision. The inaction of the one inflames the anger of the other. This pattern can present as one nagging spouse and one anxious spouse. Inaction can also be passive-aggressive. It can be a way of getting back at the other by not doing what the other wants.

**Fight - Submit**: There may not be much active fighting in this pattern. One who fights usually gets his or her way and so dominates. The other surrenders his or her own wishes in order to keep peace.

**Fight - Flee**: When one fights, the other may seek to escape or avoid the issue. One may escape into watching TV, work, drugs/alcohol.

**Fight - Communicate**: One tries to communicate openly while the other expresses anger. This pattern will generally evolve either into one of the above patterns or into mutual open communication.

## COMMUNICATION RULES/GUIDELINES

Avoid knocking your partner down (putting the person down verbally). The person gets more and more defensive and harder to reach.

Don't hit "**below the belt**". Don't throw back information given in trust. Don't bring up past mistakes.

## COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

"**Take responsibility for your own normal angry feelings.**" Admit that you are angry when you are and don't blame your anger on another no one but you can make you feel angry.

"Express your angry feelings at the Time you become angry." Don't build up hostility toward a blow-up. This helps keep anger in control so it is not destructive to you or others.

"Express your angry feelings honestly and assertively so That no one is hurt in the process." This means effectively communicating your feelings in a way that does not put the other person on the defensive and in such a way that he or she has a possibility of understanding the problem and changing his or her behavior.

When anger is intense and you feel like exploding, try non-destructive physical activity to blow off steam beat up your pillow, exercise journal.

"Learn ways to express your feelings as they are developing. Use "I" statements to avoid blaming or putting down others. Such as:

I am getting angry.

I am getting very upset.

I really don't like what you're doing.

I get mad when you do that.

Combining an "I" statement with a request for action will lower hostility - Such as, I get angry when you're fifteen minutes 'late every time we get together. I would really appreciate your being on time from now on.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Once you realize you're cognitive distortions and emotion(s), you can make the choice to tell yourself to "stay in control" and choose an alternate response.

**Choices available include the following:**

- 1) **LISTEN....** Becoming a better listener at least will slow you down and may even prevent those times when you blurt comments in anger that you later regret. Listen more and talk less even when you have an opposing point of view. You may also widen your perspective on a situation just by listening first before you speak.
- 2) **ASK MORE QUESTIONS** ... asking questions that generate more than a YES or NO answer requires the other person to clarify his/her position and gives both of you additional time to calm down.
- 3) **DISAGREE DIPLOMATICALLY** ... people are entitled to their opinions just as you are and usually will honor your rights if you don't attack their beliefs and make them feel defensive.
- 4) **SHARE RESPONSIBILITY** ... involving the other person in coming up with solutions to problem situations allows them to buy into the solution and shares the responsibility for solving any misunderstandings. Please note that their perceptions of being involved in developing solutions may be more important than whether or not their ideas are adopted.
- 5) **HANDLE STRESSES** ... team to recognize the symptoms and steps for dealing, with it. Identify any people, places, or situations that are common to your stressful times and plan for future occurrences; be prepared rather than reacting all of the time.

## TIME OUT ROUTINES FOR COUPLES

### Initiate time-outs when you:

- 1) Feel you are emotionally upset, overloaded, or angry
- 2) Sense that the other person is becoming more emotional or withdrawn than is useful to continue useful dialogue
- 3) Hear yourself or the other saying the same thing over and over
- 4) Hear the emotional intensity rising
- 5) Feel ANY early warning signs that emotional overload could lie ahead

### To initiate a time-out:

- 1) Use a silent, prearranged signal, such as in sports. Do not discuss it.
- 2) Turn IMMEDIATELY and leave to pre-designated places without further dialogue.
- 3) Write in a journal, if you would like, to clarify for yourself the topic you were discussing and the points you wanted to make.
- 4) It is helpful if you can to list the concerns you heard the other person saying.
- 5) Self-soothe. Use distraction, writing in a journal, taking a walk, etc.
- 6) Remain disengaged until both of you are feeling better. Do not try to discuss the topic again until
  - a) You first have experienced at least one day of normal pleasant time together, or
  - b) You are confident that both of you are ready and willing to try again.
- 7) Re-engage first in normal activity.
- 8) When you attempt to re-engage, if the other doesn't feel ready and gives you the time-out sign, give the other as much time as he/she needs.
- 9) Try discussing it again.

### EXIT RULES

- 1) No door slamming
- 2) No parting comments
- 3) Sooner is better than later
- 4) Focus on your own exit, not on what the other is or isn't doing
- 5) NEVER block the other from leaving
- 6) REMIND YOURSELF that this is a time-out, not a permanent separation. Beware of all-or-nothing thinking.

**Basic Rule, WHEN THE GOING GETS HOT, KEEP COOL AND GET GOING.**