



## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

### TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show the amount of disagreements are not related to marital happiness as much as how they are handled. Happy couples do not avoid disagreements; they resolve them while remaining respectful of each other, thereby strengthening their relationship. This Ten Step Model is a simple, but effective way to resolve conflict while avoiding the common and destructive patterns. Use this model with an ongoing issue in your relationship, as well as future issues.

**1. Set a time and place for discussion.**

**2. Define the problem - Be specific.**

**3. List the ways you each contribute to the problem.**

Partner 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Partner 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.**

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_ 4) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Brainstorm**—Pool your new ideas and try to list 10 possible solutions to the problem. Do not judge or criticize any of the suggestions at this point.

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 6) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_ 7) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_ 8) \_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_ 9) \_\_\_\_\_

5) \_\_\_\_\_ 10) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions.** (Be as objective as possible. Talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for resolving your issue.)

**7. Agree on one solution to try.**

**8. Agree how you will each work toward this solution.** (Be as specific as possible.)

Partner 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Partner 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.**

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Reward each other for progress.** (If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.)



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*“Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way – that is not easy.”*

—Aristotle

### HOW TO TAKE A TIME-OUT

Some conflicts become heated as levels of anger and frustration rise. Rather than speaking assertively, partners begin to accuse, criticize, or yell. Rather than listening actively, partners interrupt, belittle, and ignore. Physiologically, the “fight or flight” response is triggered as each person goes into a protection mode with little or no regard for their partner. In this state of escalation, it is not uncommon to say or do things we later regret. Moreover, it is nearly impossible to have a productive conversation leading to a mutually agreed upon resolution. This is when a “time-out” can be beneficial. A time-out provides couples with an opportunity to cool down, identify their feelings and needs, and begin to think productively again about how to approach the issues they face.

**1. RECOGNIZE your need for a time-out.** Are your fists clenched? Is your face red? Are you breathing fast? Are the tears streaming down your face? Do you feel like screaming or throwing something? Are you afraid of your partner’s intensity? Do you feel emotionally closed off?

- Learn to recognize the signs that things have become too intense for you to have a productive interaction with your partner.
- What physical and emotional reactions indicate you need a time-out?

**2. REQUEST THE TIME-OUT.** Call a time-out for yourself by saying something like “I’m just too angry to talk right now; I need to take a time-out. Please give me an hour to calm down and gather my thoughts.”

- Remember to call the time-out for yourself. It is seldom helpful to tell the other person “You need a time-out!” Suggest a time when you think you’ll be ready to resume.

**3. RELAX AND CALM DOWN.** Take some deep breaths. Go for a jog. Take a walk or a bath. Write in your journal. Read, pray, or watch television for a while.

- Do something that will help you relax and recover from the emotional intensity.
- What method(s) could you use to calm down?

**4. REMEMBER WHAT’S IMPORTANT.**

- Try to identify what you were thinking and feeling that became so difficult to discuss.
- Think about “I” messages you could use to tell your partner what you were thinking or feeling, and what you need from him/her.
- Try to spend some quiet time considering your partner’s point of view and what they are feeling.
- Remember the two of you are a team, and the only way your relationship will “win” is if you work toward a solution that both individuals can feel good about.

**5. RESUME THE CONVERSATION.** Bring in the skills of Assertiveness and Active Listening and/or the Ten Steps for Conflict Resolution. These structured skills can help contain the intensity as you attempt to resolve a conflict. Honor your commitment to return to the issue when you are ready to have a more productive conversation.



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*“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”*

—Mahatma Gandhi

### SEEKING AND GRANTING FORGIVENESS

All couples eventually experience times of conflict, hurt, and letting each other down. Sometimes the offense is as minor as forgetting a date or failing to run an errand. For some couples, the offense might involve a major betrayal such as infidelity, addiction, or abuse. Either way, taking time to seek and grant forgiveness can play a powerful role in healing and restoring the relationship.

Forgiveness is the decision or choice to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts toward an offender in order to be free from anger and resentment. This process promotes healing and restoration of inner peace, and it can allow reconciliation to take place in the relationship.

It is also important to be clear about what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not forgetting, condoning, or perpetuating injustice. Since it is sometimes unsafe or impossible, forgiveness does not always involve reconciliation. Forgiveness is not always quick; it is a process that can take time to unfold. Don't rush your partner if they need to spend days or weeks working through the process of granting forgiveness.

#### **Six Steps for Seeking Forgiveness:**

1. Admit what you did was wrong or hurtful.
2. Try to understand/empathize with the pain you have caused.
3. Take responsibility for your actions and make restitution if necessary.
4. Assure your partner you will not do it again.
5. Apologize and ask for forgiveness.
6. Forgive yourself.

#### **Six Steps for Granting Forgiveness:**

1. Acknowledge your pain and anger.
2. Be specific about your future expectations and limits.
3. Give up your right to “get even,” but insist on being treated better in the future.
4. Let go of blame, resentment, and negativity toward your partner.
5. Communicate your act of forgiveness to your partner.
6. Work toward reconciliation (when safe).