

# Conflict Handout

## Goals for Couples Regarding Conflict

As a couple, you want to **pay specific attention to conflict**. Again, build the positive, not ignore the negative in the meantime.

They predict how successful you were going to be in your communication as a couple.

**Goals** (high level) I have for every couple are fairly general. They apply to most relationships and your goal is to look at these and discern which ones you need to focus on right away and which ones you need to defer. Some, you may already do well or can easily be postponed:

1. **Can you effectively talk about the difficulties in the relationship?**

Are you able to talk about absolutely any topic without entering into a disagreement? **Expectations are key:** Sometimes agreeing to disagree is the highest level you will achieve. Not every argument will have a solution or resolution.

2. **When you are in a difficult conversation, are the two of you, without a therapist, helping you, able to successfully manage the conversation?**

When you can prevent the likelihood of conflict, manage conflict without hitting below the belt, interrupt a pattern you don't like, 80% of the time, then you have a new level of communication. When you still hit the difficulty, are you able to effectively talk about it afterward and come up with some ideas of how to improve?

3. **Do both of you agree on the rules of engagement and what constitutes hitting below the belt?** Are you able to get back on track 80% of the time if somebody does below the belt? Are you able to take breaks when things get off track?

4. **Are you able to be open and vulnerable with one another, from the start?** Are you able to successfully use I statements instead of you statements?

5. **When your partner is hurting, are you able to let them know that their pain matters to you?** “I am sorry you feel that way,” is neither an apology nor letting them know their pain matters. “I am sorry you are in pain,” acknowledges their pain and its impact on you. “I’m sorry that I hurt you,” is an acknowledgement of your contribution to the situation. Changed behavior is the actual apology, not the words that indicate you have regret for what you did. Are you able to let them know that their needs matter to you? Do they know they can rely on you?
  
6. **When you get overwhelmed or overstimulated in a conversation, are each/both of you able to calm yourself down?** Are you practiced enough to then help your partner reach calmness?
  
7. **Are you able and willing to de-escalate when things get intense?** Do you show this or say it?
  
8. **Are you able to use Bayes rule and Nash equilibrium?** Do you compromise in a way that shows integrity, sacrifice and a willingness to negotiate in good faith?
  
9. **Are you able to see that it is the two of you as a partnership, as a team, against the problem?** Not us against each other. Not us as adversaries, opponents or enemies.
  
10. **Are you able to talk about your own hurt without accusing your partner and without blaming or criticizing them?** Do you have enough practice communicating that? Are you willing to let them in and see your pain? Are you willing to get to know each other and understand each other, leaving the judgment behind?
  
11. **Are you able to have discussion and negotiation about what you want and need in your relationship?** Do you need to go to the internet and search for “basic human needs” to see what needs are? Are you able to follow through

with actions after the conversation about needs? Are you able to ask for what you want? It is harder than it sounds.

**12. Are you able to continuously improve in the relationship with feedback loops?** A mistake most couples make is that they improve the relationship, then a few weeks later, they go back to old habits. The new habits are not strong enough without being reinforced. Talking weekly about these habits and goals clears the air regularly and reinforces what is working well. Are you able to objectively look at your contribution to making things better the next time?

Goals for conflict are important to have. Why? You have a purpose, a reason to work toward something.

You also can measure if you got the results you are looking for. If you are looking to improve, can you measure the improvement and change accordingly?

All couples have conflict, the difference is that the masters of relationship are able to do them well and end up closer as a result. Keep working until you achieve that. You will appreciate the difference in your relationship.