



FIGHT FAIR

How to Successfully Deal with Conflict in Your Relationship



Our Experience with Conflict

- How comfortable are you with conflict?
- Family of origin
 - How did your family handle conflict growing up?
 - In what ways do you repeat your families patterns of dealing with conflict? In what ways do you differ?



Purpose of Conflict

- “Confrontation”: to meet face to face
- Change cannot happen without conflict
- False peace vs. true peace



Safety and the Emotional Bank Account

The Emotional Bank Account



Make “deposits” by creating and building on positive moments with your partner. Emotional savings will serve as a cushion when times get rough.

Dr. John Gottman

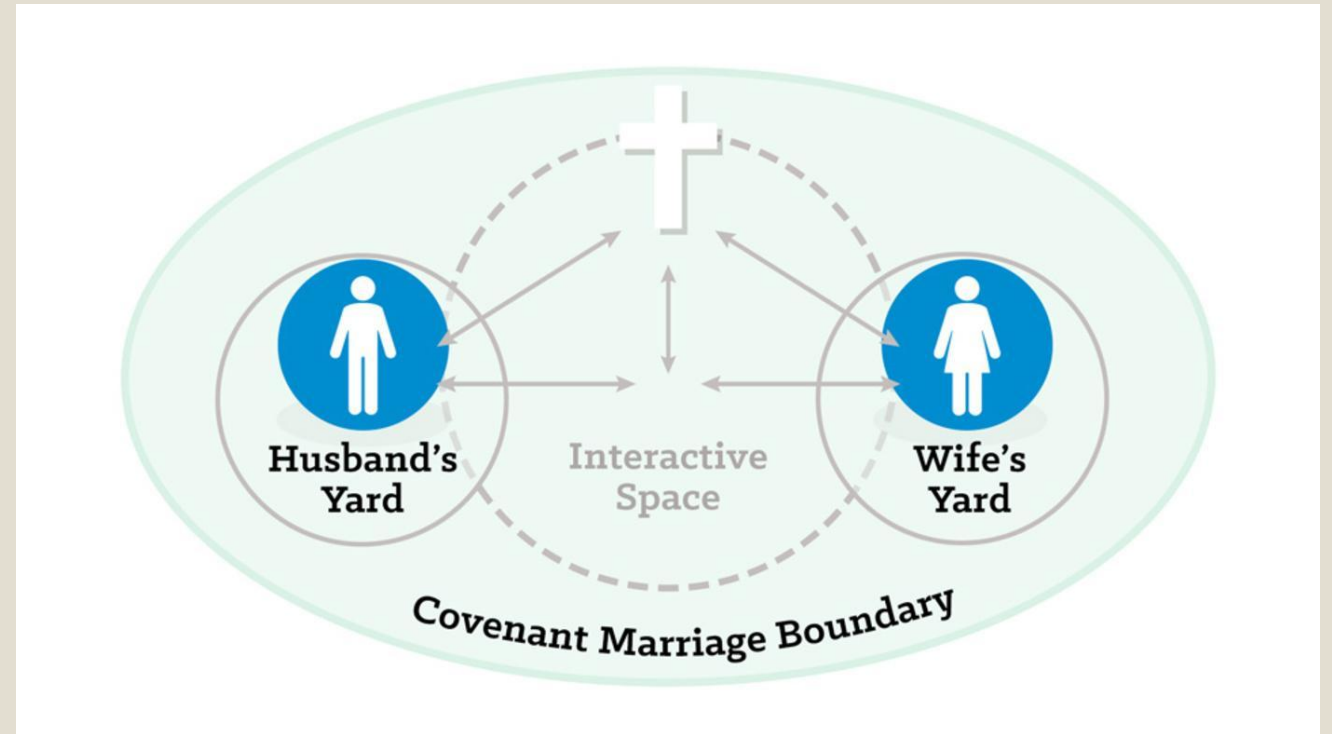


Pause to Talk

- Individually rate on a scale 1-10 how safe you feel bringing up a difficult topic with your partner and potentially having a fight
- Share your number with your partner
- If either of your numbers are a 5 or below, take some time now or this week to talk about why that is and what are some things you can do to increase safety

Healthy Marriage Model (Focus on the Family)

- Healthy adult: capable of fully taking care of themselves and have taken responsibility to do so
- “Yard” = self care physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually





5 STEPS TO FIGHT BETTER IF YOUR RELATIONSHIP IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Kyle Benson, The Gottman Relationship Blog Oct. 2016




Step 1: Soften your start-up

- Proverbs 15:1: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”
- How?
 - Don't let things build up
 - Be polite and appreciative
 - Describe what's happening
 - Take responsibility
 - Use “I statements”
- Pause to try: think of a recent (low-key) argument that you had and take turns coming up with a gentle start up that could have been used



Step 2: Learn to send and receive repair attempts

- Repair attempt: attempt to de-escalate tension and avoid damage
- What matters is not the attempt itself, but that it *gets through* to your spouse
- Examples:
<https://www.gottman.com/blog/r-is-for-repair/>
- Pause to talk:
 - During your most recent conflict, what repair attempts were used and did they work?
 - If not, share with your partner one repair attempt you think you'd receive better

 **Gottman Repair Checklist**

I Feel	I Need to Calm Down
1. I'm getting scared.	1. Can you make things safer for me?
2. Please say that more gently.	2. I need things to be calmer right now.
3. Did I do something wrong?	3. I need your support right now.
4. That hurt my feelings.	4. Just listen to me right now and try to understand.
5. That felt like an insult.	5. Tell me you love me.
6. I'm feeling sad.	6. Can I have a kiss?
7. I feel blamed. Can you rephrase that?	7. Can I take that back?
8. I'm feeling unappreciated.	8. Please be gentler with me.
9. I feel defensive. Can you rephrase that?	9. Please help me calm down.
10. Please don't lecture me.	10. Please be quiet and listen to me.
11. I don't feel like you understand me right now.	11. This is important to me. Please listen.
12. Sounds like it's all my fault.	12. I need to finish what I was saying.
13. I feel criticized. Can you rephrase that?	13. I am starting to feel flooded.
14. I'm getting worried.	14. Can we take a break?
15. Please don't withdraw.	15. Can we talk about something else for a while?

Sorry	Stop Action!
1. My reactions were too extreme. Sorry.	1. I might be wrong here.
2. I really blew that one.	2. Please let's stop for a while.
3. Let me try again.	3. Let's take a break.
4. I want to be gentler to you right now and I don't know how.	4. Give me a moment. I'll be back.
5. Tell me what you hear me saying.	5. I'm feeling flooded.
6. I can see my part in all this.	6. Please stop.
7. How can I make things better?	7. Let's agree to disagree here.
8. Let's try that one over again.	8. Let's start all over again.
9. What you are saying is...	9. Hang in there. Don't withdraw.
10. Let me start again in a softer way.	10. I want to change the topic.
11. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.	11. We are getting off track.

Get to Yes	I Appreciate
1. You're starting to convince me.	1. I know this isn't your fault.
2. I agree with part of what you're saying.	2. My part of this problem is...
3. Let's compromise here.	3. I see your point.
4. Let's find our common ground.	4. Thank you for...
5. I never thought of things that way.	5. That's a good point.
6. This problem is not very serious in the big picture.	6. We are both saying...
7. I think your point of view makes sense.	7. I understand.
8. Let's agree to include both our views in a solution.	8. I love you.
9. What are your concerns?	9. I am thankful for...
	10. One thing I admire about you is...
	11. I see what you're talking about.
	12. This is not your problem, it's OUR problem.

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Step 3: Sooth yourself (and each other)

- Flooding
- Am I caring for myself emotionally?
- Time outs and rules
- Pause to talk:
 - For me:
 - What makes me feel flooded?
 - What kinds of things sooth me?
 - For your partner:
 - What can I do to help sooth you when you're flooded?
 - What signals can we send to tell each other we're feeling flooded?



Step 4: Compromise

- Can compromise in the outcome, or how you handle the situation
- Are you open to your partner's influence?
- Pause to take the quiz
 - https://content.randomhouse.com/assets/9780307347114/pdfs/Quiz_Are_You_Open_to_Your_Partners_Influence.pdf



Step 5: Address emotional injuries





THE FOUR HORSEMEN

Get them out!



Criticism

- Attacking your partner's personality or character
- Antidote: a gentle start-up
- Pause to separately rate your struggle with criticism 1-10



Contempt

- Attacking your partner's sense of self with intention to insult or abuse
- Antidote: build a culture of appreciation
- Pause to separately rate your struggle with contempt in your relationship 1-10



Defensiveness

- “Perceived” attack
- Antidote: take responsibility
- Effective apology
- Pause to separately rate your struggle with defensiveness 1-10



Stonewalling

Individually rate
your level of
stonewalling in the
relationship 1-10



Pause to talk

- Share your individual ratings for each of the four horsemen with each other
- Do any or all of them show up regularly in your relationship? If so, why do you think that is?
- What are some ways you can use the appropriate antidotes to minimize the four horsemen as much as possible?



GROUND RULES



Before the conversation...

- Ask yourself, “Why do I feel upset?”
 - Is it really that the trash didn’t get taken out, or is it that you feel like responsibility for the house is not shared evenly and this is just one more example?
 - Think about your own feelings before starting a conflict conversation
- This is part of emotional health (healthy marriage model)
- Repeated arguments are a sign that you’re not really dealing with the actual issue at hand



Discuss ONE issue at a time

- It's easy to spiral into more than one topic during an argument; "you shouldn't have spent so much without telling me" can turn into "you don't care about our family!"
 - Now we have to deal with two (or more) problems instead of the one
 - When we get off topic, it can become about everything we've ever done wrong
 - 1 Corinthians 13:5 – "Love...keeps no record of wrongs"



Respect and kindness

- No degrading language
 - Ephesians 4:29 – “Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them”
- No yelling
 - Ephesians 4:31 – “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with malice”
- Take turns talking
 - PAUSE for practice: each person talk for 1 minute uninterrupted, partner reflects back what they heard, then switch partners



Talking to others

- We are designed to live in community, to love and support one another – we may want to talk about our relationship conflict with others outside the relationship
- BE CAUTIOUS!
 - If you share with others, do so discerningly: with few, who are trusted and believers, and who support you *as a couple*
 - Both partners should agree on whether a topic is discussed outside the relationship or not
 - Take a few minutes and talk with your partner about sharing your conflict with others:
 - Does one of you need more outside support than the other? How does that make the other person feel?
 - Are we comfortable or uncomfortable with anyone knowing about our conflict?



God's grace and progression

- We NEED God to love our partner/spouse well; you will fail in your own willpower
 - Am I “remaining in the vine”? (John 15:4)
- Progress not perfection
 - Conflict, hurt, and mistakes are inevitable in every human relationship – but we are able to grow and be shaped more and more into the likeness of Christ, and marriage was designed to be a model of Christ's relationship with US
 - The process is lifelong and none of us “arrive”

