

Together Notes: Three steps for resolving conflict

Conflict is normal because we are different. Below are three steps to help us¹. That is not to say that handling conflict is simple or pain free. But if we don't tackle things as they arise we may find that over time the unresolved issues - large or small - create distance between us. We may even find that a wall of bitterness and resentment divides us. But, resolving conflict well is part of the process of 'iron sharpening iron' to grow as people and to grow together in our marriages.

Step 1: Lovingly confront each other

- Choose a time and a place to talk (not in public).
- Handle anger in a healthy way.
- Target the issue, not the person.
- Take time out if things get heated.
- Use 'I' messages and say what you feel, not 'you' messages which attack your partner.
- Watch your words and your tone.
- Listen actively to understand - 'put yourself in their shoes'.
- If you've hurt your partner, say sorry and mean it.

Step 2: Forgive one another

In most cases there needs to be mutual forgiveness, because we both hurt each other. Problems in marriage are rarely one-sided issues. It may be 50:50 or it may be 80:20. Take responsibility for your part, even if it's only 20 percent and don't take responsibility for your partner's problems.

The one who has caused hurt

- Admit what you've done to hurt the other – ask for God's help.
- Apologise for the hurt caused – be specific.
- Ask for forgiveness.

The one who has been hurt

- Make a conscious decision to forgive.
- Seek God's help to forgive.
- Show forgiveness through your words and actions.
- Be specific about what you are forgiving.
- Be generous and gracious in your words and actions.
- Choose to let go of resentment.

Step 3: Agree actions to bring reconciliation and restore closeness

- Ask God for help to find a way forward.
- Take the initiative to reconcile.
- Take responsibility for yourself, not the other person.
- Think of creative options for a way forward.
- Talk about the options together.
- Be prepared to compromise.
- Agree what you are going to do and do it.
- Agree a time to review.
- Seek help from a third party if needed.

¹ Adapted from 'Resolving Conflict: Communication III', FamilyLife USA 'Weekend To Remember' conference manual. Revised 1/04. Used with permission.