

5. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Session Materials

Couple's Workbook: *Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict (one copy per person)*

Couple's Report: *Conflict Resolution*

Ice Breaker

- What is something most people don't know about you?

Group Discussion

- A majority of couples (78%) report they go out of their way to avoid conflict in their relationship. What do you think of this strategy? What are the pros and cons of this approach?
- It is not uncommon to talk about winning or losing an argument, but why is there no such thing as a win/lose outcome in relational conflict? (*Answer: if either partner feels like they've lost, the whole relationship has lost*).

Teaching Points

- All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show marital happiness is more related to how conflict is handled, and not the number of disagreements experienced by a couple. "Happiness is not the absence of conflict, but flows from the ability to cope with it." (*Share a personal example if you have one*).
- Conflict can be an opportunity in disguise. When handled well, it can increase understanding, intimacy and trust. What does "handling conflict well" look like?
 - Use good communication skills – listening and speaking.
 - Avoid "mind-reading" which assumes you know your partner's thoughts, feelings, or motives.
 - Focus on the issue or behavior, not on the other person.
 - Take your partner seriously. Don't dismiss them or their feelings.
 - Stay specific and in the present. Overgeneralizations ("always and never") or piling on past issues makes it tough to move forward.
 - Stay calm, even if that means you need to take a time-out to calm down.
 - Find a resolution that feels like a "win" for both partners.
 - Use the *Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict* to help put these principles into practice.

5. Conflict Resolution

Couple Exercise (*handout report and workbook pages*)

- We are going to take about 20 minutes for you to review your Conflict Resolution results and then go through the workbook exercise, *Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict*.
 - First, review your Conflict Resolution results in the Couple's Report.
 - Next, begin to work through the *Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict*. (*Instructors may want to quickly review and explain each step*).
 - Pick an issue in your life that needs resolution and begin using the Ten Steps. For most couples, it will not be difficult to find an issue that needs resolution. If you are struggling to find an issue to talk about, consider the following:
 - Is there a decision that needs to be made and you have strong differences of opinion?
 - Is there an ongoing issue or stressor that needs resolution?
 - What was your last argument about? Did you reach a point of resolution?
 - Are there any big differences in your personalities or families that could cause future issues? If so, use the Ten Steps to anticipate how you might handle these differences.

Group Wrap-Up

- How do the Relationship Dynamics (*Assertiveness, Avoidance, Self Confidence and Partner Dominance*) impact Conflict Resolution?
- Which of the *Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict* do you think is most important?
- How can these steps lead to a win/win outcome?

Bonus Material and Closing Suggestions

- If you started the *Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict* and didn't have time to finish, keep working through the process this week.
- Review the *How to Take a Time-Out* exercise in the Couple's Workbook.
- Review the *Seeking and Granting Forgiveness* exercise in the Couple's Workbook.
- Tape a copy of the *Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict* exercise to your refrigerator, and use it when needed!