How to Reduce Conflict and Create Harmony In Your Marriage

I. Understand the Dynamics of Conflict in Your Marriage.

A. Because conflict is inevitable in every marriage and because it has the potential to either make or break your relationship, one of the most powerful things you can do to protect your marriage is to ____________________________ to handle it.

B. Conflict can either push us _______________ together, or _______________ us apart from each other, depending on how we handle it.

II. Deal With Anger and Practice Self-Control.

A. God gave us the emotion of anger, and gives us ______________________ to be angry, but wants us to distinguish between righteous anger, and ______________________ anger.

Be angry, and yet do not sin; don’t let the sun go down on your anger. Eph 4:26

B. Righteous anger is unselfish; expressed and resolved in ________________________ ways that honors your mate’s right to dignity, safety and security.

C. Sinful anger is anger that is selfishly expressed through ______________________________- words and deeds that are meant to punish and/or hurt your mate.

“Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you.” James 4:1

“But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.” Colossians 3:8

D. Sinful anger in marriage is often rooted in a belief that my mate should never do anything to upset me, but should always act in ways that makes me comfortable and happy. Then, when my mate does something that upsets me or causes me discomfort and unhappiness, I react and do one or two things:

(1) 

(2) 

E. Sinful anger creates fear, destroying trust and ____________________________ in the relationship, and making your marriage no longer safe.

“…for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” James 1:20

F. Sinful anger harms both parties, destroys love, puts the marriage relationship at ________________, and displeases God.
III. Avoid Four Patterns That Can Harm A Relationship

A. _________________________ occurs when spouses negatively respond back and forth to each other, continually upping the ante so that conditions get worse and worse.

B. ___________________________ is a pattern in which one spouse subtly or overtly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other.

C. __________________________ and avoidance are different ways of expressing one’s unwillingness to get into or stay with sensitive discussions.

D. ___________________ ________________________ occur when one partner believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is actually the case.

IV. When Anger Escalates Call a “Time Out”

A. Time Out is a vital tool for keeping conflicts from ________________________________ out of control. It’s perhaps the single most useful strategy for keeping peace, preventing verbal abuse and strife from damaging a loving relationship.

B. When an aversive sequence of attack and counter-attack _______________________, “Time Out” is the most effective way to break the chain reaction and prevent emotional damage.

C. Agree with your partner on the ______________________ ____________________ signs that most typically lead to escalation for you.

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  •
D. Rules for Calling a Time Out

a. It’s important you not use “Time Out” to ____________________________ ____________________________ ____________________________.

b. If an hour isn’t long enough to fully calm down, if you’re still feeling upset, make sure you arrange a time for discussion when you expect to feel less vulnerable.

c. *No ____________________________ Stop Action*. When one partner calls a time out the other partner has two options: (a) say nothing more or say, (b)”Okay, time out.” *Everything stops.*

d. The person calling time out should __________________________ the room or the house immediately for about an hour. Stay out of each other’s presence for the entire time; don’t return early.

e. *Always return when the ____________________________.* Failing to return only makes things worse.

f. Don’t ____________________________ during the time out. Drugs and alcohol can exacerbate anger, cause impulsivity, and reduce self-control.

g. Don’t ____________________________ what you said or should have said. It’s inadvisable to call or visit friends because you’ll tend to complain or build a case against your partner.

h. During the stop-action period, ____________________________. *Pray, journal, walk, exercise, run, ride a bike or some other form of physical exercise.*

i. ____________________________ with your mate when the time out is over. Ask if your partner is ready to talk about the issue at hand. If not, set another time to come back together and talk.

V. Use The Speaker-Listener Technique

A. Rules For Both the Speaker and the Listener

1. The *Speaker* has the ____________________________.

2. ____________________________ the floor

3. No ____________________________

B. Rules For The Speaker

1. Speak for ____________________________.

2. Keep what you have to say ____________________________ and ____________________________.

3. Stop and let the *Listener* ____________________________.

C. Rules For The Listener

1. Paraphrase what you ____________________________.

2. Focus on the *Speaker’s* ____________________________.
VI. Ground Rules for Handling Conflict

**Ground Rule # 1**

When conflict is escalating, we will call for a *Time Out* and use the *Speaker Listener Technique*. (If a Time Out is called for, agree to talk through the issue at a later, specified time using the Speaker-Listener Technique.

**Ground Rule # 2**

When either of us is having trouble understanding each other or being understood, we will use the Speaker-Listener Technique.

**Ground Rule # 3**

When we are having a disagreement or a difficulty in communicating, we will address one issue at a time, and will not complicate the discussion by trying to discuss multiple issues at the same time.

**Ground Rule # 4**

We can bring up issues at any time, but the Listener can say: “This is not a good time.” If the Listener doesn’t want to talk at that time, he or she takes responsibility for setting up a time to talk in the near future.

**Ground Rule #5**

When we are taking time for fun, friendship and sensuality, we agree to protect these times from conflict and the need to deal with tough or sensitive issues.

We hereby pledge our commitment to following the all of the above ground rules in handling our conflicts.

_____________________________________________      ____________________  
Signature of Husband       Date

_____________________________________________      ____________________  
Signature of Wife       Date
MarriageBuilders Tool Kit
Project
Reducing Conflict and Creating Harmony in Your Marriage

Individually: 20 minutes

Review your notes from the audio session, “How to Reduce Conflict and Create Harmony in Your Marriage,” and write down your answers to the following questions:

1. Considering how you and your mate typically relate to each other and communicate during conflict, how would you rate your overall effectiveness in handling conflict? Circle the number on the following scale you think most applies to your marriage:

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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   Effective Ineffective

2. When you have a conflict with your spouse, does it “push you together,” or “pull you apart?”
   Do you think conflict can really bring spouses closer? How?

3. Ephesians 4:26 says: “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”
   a. What does “Be angry and do not sin” mean?
   b. What does inappropriately expressed anger do to a marriage relationship?

4. Think of a recent misunderstanding between you and your spouse. (It may have been over finances, children, vacation plans, choices, schedule, relatives, clothing, etc.) How did you each relate and react to each other?

5. If you could change one thing about the way you handle conflict, what would it be?

6. What is one thing from this session that you will commit to working on in your marriage?

7. Review the “Ground Rules for Handling Conflict” (page 4 of study guide), and the following personal pledge. Will you commit to following these ground rules when you have a conflict with your spouse?

Interact as a Couple: 30-40 minutes

1. Discuss the questions you answered during your individual time.

2. Review together the “Ground Rules for Handling Conflict,” (page 4). If both of you are willing, each of you sign your names to the document as your pledge of commitment to each other.