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Our Relationship.... And Parenting Through Conflict

by Kathy Bosch, Extension Specialist, Family Life Education

Even the most compatible, passionate, energetic and loving couple will have conflict at times. Conflict itself is not bad. It is the way people deal with conflict that may cause problems. If conflict does not serve a purpose or solve a problem it can cause disruption and chaos. However, couples who do not have open conflict probably ignore issues that need attention. Couples with a strong relationship can handle conflict, negotiate and resolve some problems, and agree to disagree on some issues.*

Fair Fighting

Children should not be purposely used as an audience or for support during parental fights. However, children can learn some valuable skills when watching their parents “fight fairly.” What does “fighting fairly” mean? Check to see if you are using some of the techniques in “fair fighting.”

Me Partner

-
- Not putting each other down
- Not devaluing each other
- Not being demeaning
- Not calling names
- Not withholding discussion or affection
- Not losing your temper
- Not getting physically hostile
- No verbal abuse
- Talking rationally
- No blaming
- Looking at both sides
- Allowing some time to deal with the conflict/
problem
- Taking some time to cool down
- Determining the main cause of conflict
- Dealing with conflict instead of avoiding or
ignoring it
- Having mutual respect for each other
- Being willing to share your feelings

Me Partner

-
- Listening to the other person
- Asking for your partner’s opinion
- Caring about your partner’s feelings
- Standing your ground for beliefs and values you
hold dear
- Recognizing that some problems will not be
solvable
- Disagreeing only over the things that really
matter
- Taking care of yourself
- Getting enough sleep, exercising, eating healthy
foods
- Having a friend or counselor to talk with
- Being honest
- Tackling the problem and not each other
- If necessary, being willing to get some help from
a third party

Choose When Children Should Hear or Be Involved

Children have a special knack for hearing things through walls and around corners! Make sure you have most of your heated arguments in private. However, there may be some occasions when you choose to involve your children in the discussion. Remember, though, that children should not be treated as adults or given adult responsibilities or concerns. You are the parent and therefore responsible for taking care of your children. Conversely, pretending things are always okay is not the best way to go either. Use your common sense. Children need to feel loved and secure and want to know that their parents love them and love each other. Children also need to learn how to handle conflict.

Self-check on Couple Conflict

When love and mutual respect are present in a partner relationship, you will not intentionally devalue or hurt the other person. Occasionally, you may say or do something that hurts the other person. Be willing to say you are sorry for what you have said or done. It will be helpful for you to do a self-check on how you handle conflict.

- How do you treat each other when you disagree or fight?
- How often do you fight?
- What issues appear to cause conflict?
- What are some of the core issues or underlying causes of your conflict?
- What behaviors or patterns have you seen emerge before/during conflict?
- Are you proud of the way you handle yourself during conflict?
- Do you share your feelings or do you feel as though you give in too much?
- Do you try to bully your partner into doing things you want done?
- Is there equality in your relationship and in the way you deal with conflict?
- Do you find alternative solutions if you cannot agree on something?
- Do you basically feel good about the decisions made?

Conflict need not be avoided because children are present. When witnessing their parents disagreeing, children can learn how to appropriately deal with problems, conflict and anger. This is an opportunity for parents to role model techniques that demonstrate love, respect, commitment and trust between family members. Problems and conflict can be managed effectively so partners do not hurt or devalue each other. Partners will enhance their relationship when they tackle and resolve problems that can be resolved, agree that some issues may not be resolved, and respect each other throughout the disagreement or conflict. In addition they will be teaching their children valuable skills.

***Note**

The partner relationship discussed in these fact sheets is assumed to be healthy with no abuse or mistreatment present. In the case of partner abuse, this information does not apply. In order to rehabilitate, the abuser must willingly seek counseling and therapy. Parents must always look out for the best interest and safety of minor children. If abuse is present in the relationship, the interests of the abusive partner should **not** be put above the well-being of dependent children.

For help call the Nebraska Statewide Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Hotline at (800) 876-6238 or National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-7233 (voice) and (800) 787-3224 (TDD).

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Index: Family Life Relationships
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