

Resolving Conflict

Healthy conflict resolution is an important skill in healthy relationships. All relationships will experience conflict—it's how the conflict is handled that really matters. Learning how to manage disagreements and solve problems while protecting the relationship is a valuable skill.

Avoid the Danger Zone...

Four common communication patterns that can be destructive to a relationship:

1. Escalation: responding negatively with each other; partners don't feel heard or understood so they become agitated; both people get caught in a vicious cycle of intense emotions and heated conversation
2. Invalidation: putting down the thoughts, opinions, and character of the other person; when a partner is put down they tend to shut down—guard their feelings and share less
3. Negative Interpretation: making a negative or unfair assumption about what your partner is thinking, saying, or doing; when we make assumptions, assume the worse, and forget to consider our partner's feelings the dynamics of the relationship become more hostile and unforgiving
4. Withdrawal/Avoidance: emotionally, mentally, or physically leaving a conversation; while a pause may be needed to calm down, collect thoughts, and process the situation, it is essential to reconnect in a timely manner

Remain in the Comfort Zone...

Four strategies that can be constructive in time of conflict:

1. Speaker-Listener: sit knee to knee and take turns talking; speaker talks and listener listens then repeats what they heard; speaker then agrees or clarifies; then roles change and the listener becomes the speaker; repeat steps and work towards a solution
2. Specific: focus on the specific incident; don't bring up past conflicts or concerns; use I-statements for example—"I felt frustrated when you didn't pick up after yourself."
3. Time-Out: a small change in timing or approach can help partners cope with conflict but be certain that it is dealt with in a timely manner
4. Avoid Assumptions: don't mind read, name game, blame, complain or "kitchen sink" (bring up past grievances and unrelated issues during an argument or time of conflict that diverts attention from the current topic of discussion making it difficult to address the current concern effectively.)