

You Think Any Conflict Will Hurt Your Marriage, Here is Why You Are Wrong

by Brad Miller

Conflict has never been the problem.

Many of you reading this have always thought that any conflict in your marriage is a problem. Therefore, you work hard to avoid fights and don't have any patience for them when you do have conflicts. After all, conflicts are just a big waste of time, right? Sometimes, you even secretly wonder if you may have married the wrong person because of the conflicts that the two of you have. You have reasoned that if you had married a different person, then there wouldn't be any conflicts, right?

The problem in your marriage is not conflict. The problem in your marriage is the inability to resolve conflict in a healthy way. There is a world of difference between those two, so let me state this point again.

“Conflict in your marriage is not a problem, the real problem is the inability to resolve conflict in a healthy way.”

Furthermore, you may lack an understanding of how to work through a conflict in a way that doesn't leave damage and destruction in its wake. Maybe, when there is conflict between you and your spouse, it rarely ends well. Many times, you might find yourself tiptoeing around the issue for days, weeks, or even months hoping to avoid stepping into that minefield again. Your conflict may eventually just seem to go away in the same way that an awful, rotten smell in your house eventually becomes unnoticeable. We all wonder, “Did the smell get resolved somehow, or did I merely stop noticing it?” The same is true of unresolved conflict – it never really goes away.

“We all underestimate the skills needed to work through conflict well.”

So, what needs to change in order to stop having conflicts that drive you and your spouse further apart? Your attitude toward conflict needs to change. What if I told you that conflict, handled well, fosters intimacy and oneness in marriage? Would you believe me? Well, it's true and I will show you how it's done. You will need to learn a few new skills and practice them, even when it feels uncomfortable, but the payoff is well worth it. I promise.

You already know that conflict, when not handled well, will drive a wedge between you and your spouse. That wedge is made up of all the issues you avoid and all of the unresolved hurt. If there was a way to destroy that wedge, you and your spouse could enjoy the closeness you once had. Are you still with me? The way to destroy that wedge is to press into conflict instead of avoiding it. But how do you “press into conflict?”

CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE

It is my hope that after reading this article, I can convince you that working through conflict is better, by far, than avoiding it. For me to be successful in convincing you, you will need to allow your attitude to change (we have written more about this in another article linked below). You will need to remind yourself often that avoiding conflict is hurtful to your marriage, but pressing into it, or working through it, is the healthier approach to take. In fact, learning to work through conflict may even save your marriage!

CALM YOURSELF DOWN

Controlling your own emotions is difficult. It could take years for you to feel like you have a handle on this one, but doing so is both doable and worth it. In our book, [Ready to Surrender](#), Tami and I teach dozens of practical skills to help you to keep control of your own emotions. You need to understand that once you have allowed your emotions to ramp up too far, your brain kicks into *fight, flight or freeze* mode. Once this happens, it is because your brain has perceived a potential threat to your survival, and you must fight to the death, flee as quickly as humanly possible, or simply freeze and be near unable to think or move. Sound familiar? Does that sound like what happens in your body when you are in conflict with your spouse? This is why you need to calm yourself down and not let your brain kick into fight, flight, or freeze. Sometimes, you need to take an adult time-out (explained in detail in Chapter 4 of [Ready to Surrender](#)) to give yourself a little time to calm down. In addition, sometimes you need to remind yourself that your spouse is someone who loves you and is not actually a threat to your survival. It may *feel* that way at times, but it's simply not true, and you need to remind yourself of what is actually true as often as you can.

When it comes to getting through conflict, we often think we just need to yell louder to make our point. Or we need to be either more demanding or more convincing to win the day. We think if we ignore these conflicts long enough, they will simply work themselves out and go away. Does this ever really work? In truth, yelling confirms to your brain that there is a threat. And demanding your own way will leave your spouse feeling misunderstood, hurt, and distant from you.

APOLOGIZE OFTEN

You *WILL* make mistakes. That is why you need to learn to apologize well. When you apologize, you are taking ownership of your own behavior and building in some accountability for yourself moving forward. A sincere apology will also help to keep you both from losing control of your emotions. Remember the previous step called “calm yourself down?” Start there whenever you need to get yourself in a mindset to apologize.

You need to remember that saying, “I’m sorry, ok?” loudly and with a tone will do more harm than good. A real apology always addresses the thought or behavior that you are taking ownership of. A real apology might sound like this, “I am so sorry for raising my voice again. I know that scares you. Please be patient with me while I continue to work on that.” That’s an apology that can move your relationship in the right direction!

REMEMBER #TEAMUS

Whenever Tami and I teach couples together, write together, or work through our own conflicts together, we remember #TeamUs. #TeamUs is a concept we came up with many years ago that reminds us that we are on the same team, that we need to seek unity between us, and that *our unity is more important than our individualism*. Some people will struggle with that last thought, that our unity as a couple is more important than our individualism, but those same people will also struggle the most in their relationships. Remember that “the two shall become one flesh.” You can certainly have your own identity and be in a thriving marriage, but your unity must trump your individuality in most circumstances. Maybe not understanding this idea has been the thing holding you back from experiencing the unity and intimacy that you long for. Hmm.

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