

## Marital Conflict

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### Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in marriage, but it can also be healthy if handled properly. Understanding the four stages of marital conflict can help save your marital relationship. According to authors Tim and Joy Downs in their book *The Seven Conflicts*, couples who never learn to manage their conflicts effectively begin a series of phases in their relationship that can ultimately destroy it.

### What is marital conflict?

Marital conflict is not just a difference of opinion. Rather, it is a series of events that have been poorly handled that have deeply damaged the marriage relationship. Marriage issues have escalated to such an extent that stubbornness, pride, anger, hurt and bitterness prevent effective marriage communication.

Almost all serious marital discord is rooted in the selfishness of one or both parties. Saving a marriage means rejecting selfishness, abandoning ego, forgiving hurt, and letting go of bitterness; These steps become more difficult, so it is best to avoid moving downwards into marital conflict. The best way to make a marriage successful is to prevent marital conflict. Premarital counselling helps in preparing for marriage. If this does not happen, marital relationship counselling soon after marriage can give couples basic marital conflict resolution strategies that can be used before marriage problems get out of control. Marriage is a relationship where trust is built over time as committed couples put their own interests aside for the well-being of their partner and develop the skills to keep the relationship positive and open.

### What is the cause of marital discord?

The main reason for marital disputes is selfishness. Another way of saying this is that marital issues arise when one party insists on having his or her own way. While everyone has individual preferences, demanding that one's self-interest prevail is a choice that will always



impact a marriage. Can any partnership be successful if one party gets its own way all the time? no way. If marriage relationship is to be successful, couples will have to develop the habit of renouncing selfishness. Eventually, sacrifice becomes a pleasure, not a chore. But the answer is not to always give up and never go your own way. The marriage bond is stronger when couples lovingly share and discuss their interests, always showing willingness to sacrifice, but honestly working together to find the best solution for the marriage. Here's how marital conflict affects marriage relationships. When husbands and wives are unable to resolve their disagreements, they fall into fairly predictable patterns of behaviour, as suggested by the four stages of marital conflict. It is important to recognize that all of these stages are passive. The phase of negotiation and compromise may appear positive, but it will fall apart without commitment and a mature understanding of the difficulties and distractions that must be overcome.

When marital communication breaks down, feelings are hurt, emotions run high and solutions seem out of reach. When marital disputes and children live in the same house, the loss increases manifold.

**Here are the four stages of marital conflict that lead to marital discord:**

- 1. Have it your way:** Couples who are newly married try to work things out by avoiding confrontation. They succumb to each other without discussing the root of the problem. If you allow yourself to give up whenever you have a fight with your husband, you will eventually find that you are tired of this pattern and will begin to shift your attitude to the next step.
- 2. This is my way:** When couples exhaust themselves by ignoring their own needs, they often turn in the opposite direction. They start demanding that their needs are now met. A wife who has kept her opinions to herself may suddenly realize that she is unhappy. And then she can start expressing her thoughts and viewpoints at every opportunity. But unfortunately, even this step does not work as the husband and wife start butting heads.
- 3. Have it your way:** The third stage involves compromising and negotiating with each other. At first, the couple may be excited by their new communication style, but eventually the curiosity wears off. At present, couples are facing demand for more time in marriage. Parental responsibilities, finances and busy schedules lead to more stress.



Between ineffective conflict resolution styles and increasing life pressures, couples may begin to doubt their compatibility during this phase.

- 4. Get it somehow:** This phase symbolizes the spirit of sacrifice. Couples in this stage become tired of the never-ending fights and may even feel hopeless that all the unresolved issues will ever be resolved. If you find yourself in this position, you need expert marriage guidance.

### **Effective marital communication**

Marriages should not end like this because of conflict. With effective communication and conflict resolution skills, couples can resolve their problems instead of avoiding or pushing through issues. If you recognize any of these negative phases in your marriage, start learning better ways to communicate with your husband. Not sure where to start? Download an ebook, read articles online or talk to successful couples you know. Download the Q&U app for couples to start conversations. If the conflict remains unresolved, consider meeting with a marriage therapist to help teach you effective strategies.

### **Conflict resolution strategies**

To maintain our commitment to love, cherish, and honor our spouse, we must surrender ourselves and our rights first to God and then to each other. Over the years, Judy and I have used several strategies to help prevent communication deadlocks, disruptions, and breakdowns. If you and your spouse are in conflict, try to approach the conflict by keeping one or more of these guidelines in mind. Stick to the problem at hand. Focus on the current conflict, and don't accuse your spouse of "always" or "never" behaving a certain way. It is never wise to keep your spouse on the defensive. Go to that side of the fence. Instead of trying to solve an issue "my way" or "your way," work toward a solution that represents "our way." Try to identify the root issue. Disputes often arise because of incidents or issues that mask the real problem. Consider what attitudes or beliefs are driving your behavior to get clues as to what the main issue is in any conflict. Don't be a mind reader. Discuss your beliefs and expectations openly. Don't try to interpret your spouse's thoughts or motives from his or her behaviour; Instead, ask direct questions. Likewise, don't expect your spouse to know what you're thinking.

Don't let the sun set on your anger. Resolving disputes takes effort and may also take time. If you haven't reached an agreement by bedtime, put the matter aside with the understanding that you will resume the discussion the next day. The anger of the night gives



Satan a foothold. Don't leave yourself (or your marriage) vulnerable. Avoid character assassination. It's okay to talk about situations and behaviour as you work to resolve the conflict. However, attacking your spouse's personality or character is never acceptable. Never forget that your relationship with your spouse is more important than "winning" an argument or "being right." Remember that love keeps no record of mistakes. Be quick to forgive, quick to admit your mistakes, and quick to move on from conflict.

