

CONFLICT RESOLUTION BEGINS WITH YOU

You need to know the answers to these before you start.

Why am I initiating or risking this conflict?

A. Raising an issue that was hurtful

- Was it intentional? – Does it happen often? – Is this the real issue, or was it something else?
- Is this something you should just let go either now or permanently?

B. Raising an issue that involved sin

- Are you confident it is sin and not just something you don't like? – Would it be appropriate to explain the situation to a Christian friend and see what they think?

Is this the time for initiating or risking conflict?

- Are the circumstances against you? (Tired, hungry, other issues of the day?)
- Did you give them time to acknowledge or confess it themselves?
- Are you able to control your own anger? Can you provide gentle answers, or do you need a few minutes?

“What do I hope to accomplish with this conflict?”

- If not sin: An apology for causing the hurt and an expression of willingness to avoid causing that hurt, when avoidable, in the future. (Are you trying to win or to restore good fellowship? What good is a win?)
- If sin: An admission of the sin, a request for forgiveness, and an indication of a desire to turn from that behavior and not repeat it. (You forgive because Christ forgave. Be eager to forgive.)
- If you want something more than either of these, you need to figure out exactly what that is and if it's really reasonable to ask for. If there is nothing your spouse can actually do in this moment to “make it right,” do not engage in the conflict. Only bring up hard issues in a way that facilitates restoring fellowship.

If you can answer every question above and are moving forward:

- I. Start with a non-threatening invitation to a hard, but calm, conversation. “I want to talk to you about something that hurt (or offended) me. I've thought about it and asked myself if I should let it go but I think it's important enough to bring up.” Unless your spouse provides good reason why this is not the time for this conversation, and offers a (soon) alternative time, move forward.
- II. “I'd like to explain it as I saw it and when I finish you can tell me if I misunderstood something or have my facts wrong.”
 - a. Keep it short and sweet. Just the facts. Be clear about what the offense or sin is. If you are interrupted, pause and repeat the sentence above and make sure you're being brief and sticking to the facts.
 - b. Then listen in order to get to the truth. Make sure, before you accuse someone of sin, and especially before you accuse them of lying or being defensive, that you've heard what they said.
 - i. Don't interrupt
 - ii. Don't impute motives or put much stock in tone or body language
 - iii. Believe what they're saying to you; take it in the most favorable light
 - iv. Repeat it back until you understand what the other is saying
- III. Resolve it. Either with an apology/acceptance, confession/forgiveness, or an acknowledgement that you were wrong and the issue isn't what you thought it was. Hug. Then move on. Really, actually, move on.