



**Head to Heart**  
Restoration Ministry

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## Conflict is Inevitable

God uniquely created every individual. How they enter in and deal with conflict depends on their inborn temperament and how conflict was modeled in their home or environment as a child.

Are you a “bottle rocket”, a “crock-pot” or some type of combination of the two when it comes to dealing with conflict? The person who deals with conflict like a bottle rocket gets angry quickly, escalates rapidly, explodes and then returns to calm, moving on to other things. Once the bottle rocket has expressed their anger and returned to calm, they can wonder why the other person is still upset, feels hurt or wounded.

The “crock pot” stuffs their anger, simmering for long periods of time, sometimes days, weeks or months. One day a simple conflict arises and the anger simmering in the crock-pot is done. When the person who deals with conflict like a crock-pot is “done” they unload all of their anger at one time, leaving the other person wondering why such a simple issue caused such an exaggerated response.

Ideally we should deal with conflict somewhere in between the bottle rocket and the crock-pot, knowing when to express our feelings at appropriate times and in healthy ways. Exploding quickly can wound others while stuffing our feelings can wound ourselves.

Since conflict is inevitable, there are several techniques that you can apply to decrease the intensity of the conflict and hopefully prevent emotional wounding.

Keep conflicts private. We have all experienced the awkward feeling of being with others when they begin to argue, often about issues that are not important. When you enter into conflict in the presence of others, it often speaks volumes of a lack of respect for one another as well as the people you are arguing in front of. When an issue that can lead to conflict arises in public, quickly stop the conflict and determine to talk about it later. If needed, apologize to those that unnecessarily had to listen and become an observer of the conflict.

Focus on one topic or issue at a time. Keep the discussion focused on the specific issue that led to the conflict. Multiple issues or jumping from one topic to the next makes it difficult to come to any resolution and makes clear communication nearly impossible. If you need to deal with multiple issues, first resolve the most critical or pressing issue. Once the most critical issue is resolved and both people agree, you can move on to the next issue or determine to stop for now and return later. Some people find conflict very difficult and emotionally draining. They cannot effectively deal with extended time in conflict resolution. Be sensitive to each other’s temperament and respect each other’s emotional energy level.

Practice active listening and reduce unnecessary distractions. Active listening involves maintaining eye contact, asking questions for clarification, and making comments that communicate that you understand what is being said, even if you do not agree. Try to eliminate unnecessary distractions that can interfere with one’s ability to focus. The television, radio, telephone, and children can be distractions that prevent active listening.



Avoid comments that can appear as attacking one's character or physical appearance. During conflict emotion and anger can escalate. Even when emotions are high you should never make comments that devalue a person's character or physical appearance. These types of comments are very wounding and hurtful. They also shift the focus of the discussion off of the primary topic. If you need to address a character or physical appearance issue it should be discussed in a safe, loving environment, apart from conflict.

During conflict, decrease the volume. Our natural tendency during conflict is to increase our volume and intensify our voice tone in order to express our anger or frustration. Effective school teachers know that when the class gets loud, instead of talking louder or yelling they can more effectively get the students attention by talking quieter and in a softer voice tone. This same technique works well during personal conflict. Decreasing your volume forces the other person to listen more attentively. In most cases they will decrease their volume. Decreased volume also helps lessen emotional intensity.

Time out! If the conflict continues to escalate, tempers are rising, and you are at an impasse, call "time out." A time out signifies that you need to step away from the conflict in order to calm down and refocus your thoughts. A time out does not mean that the discussion is over. Whenever some one calls a time out, you both need to agree to a set time in come back together and continue the discussion. A time out can range from as little as ten minutes to several hours. The important thing is that you come back together. For the person who deals with conflict like a "crock-pot" and avoids conflict and stuffs their emotions, they may find it difficult to enter back in to the discussion following the time out. For the person who deals with conflict like a "bottle rocket" a time out allows them to calm down, and decreases the chance for causing emotional wounds.

Some times as hard as your may try, a conflict can not be resolved and you have to "agree to disagree." When you agree to disagree, both persons acknowledge that agreement cannot be reached. This can be an acceptable conflict resolution technique as long as it does not have a major impact on the relationship or a significant life decision. If it does, you will need to take time to individually think, reflect and pray, understanding that at some point you will need to enter back into the discussion and seek resolution.

Seek counseling and help if conflicts appear to be defining your relationship. Ongoing, frequent, or volatile conflicts can be an indicator of deeper problems within yourself or the relationship. A trained Christian counselor may be able to help you find solutions to life's hurts and effectively resolve problems.

Conflict is inevitable but it does not have to negatively impact you or your relationships. Depending on your temperament and how you generally respond to conflict, some techniques will be easier to apply than others. By learning and applying healthy conflict resolution techniques you can reduce problems, the frequency and intensity of conflict and build strong relationship with others.