



CENTERSTONE

Wellness Program

7 Ways Couples Add Conflict to Conflict

Money and marriage can be a dicey combination. Research shows that money is the most common source of conflict between couples. So, it is no surprise that financial pressure can disable dreams, wreck relationships and cripple communication between couples. However, good communication can improve relationships and increase intimacy, trust and support.

The converse is also true: poor communication can weaken bonds, create distrust and even cause contempt. No matter the source of conflict, good communication is necessary to minimize tension and stress. Here are some examples of negative and destructive communication patterns that can exacerbate conflict in any relationship.

Avoiding Conflict

Rather than discussing frustrations in a calm and respectful manner, some people don't say anything to their partner until they are ready to explode. Then, they tend to blurt out feelings in an angry and hurtful way. Avoiding an argument altogether seems to be less stressful. However, as tensions rise and resentments fester, avoiding conflict actually causes more stress on both parties. The result is usually a much bigger argument. It is much healthier to address and resolve conflict.

Being Defensive

When resolving conflict couples should address their partner's complaints objectively, with a willingness to understand their point of view. Often, defensive people deny any wrongdoing and do not acknowledge the possibility that they could be contributing to a problem. Denying responsibility may seem to alleviate stress in the short run, but actually creates long-term problems. Partners don't feel as though their significant other listens to them, and unresolved conflicts continue to grow.

Being Right

The point of a relationship discussion is to seek mutual understanding and find resolutions that respect everyone's needs. It is damaging to determine there is a right and wrong way to look at things, and that your way of seeing things is right. Don't demand your partner see things the same way as you, and don't take it as a personal attack if they have a different opinion. Look for a compromise, or agree to disagree. Remember that there is not always right or wrong answer. Both points of view can be valid.

Playing the Blame Game

Some people handle conflict by criticizing or blaming someone else for the situation. For these people, admitting personal fault weakens their credibility. They avoid it at all costs. Often, these individuals place shame and fault on others. Instead, try to view conflict as an opportunity to analyze a situation objectively. Assess the needs of both parties, and come up with a solution that helps each individual.

Generalizing

Some individuals blow conflicts out of proportion and make sweeping generalizations. Avoid beginning sentences with "you always" or "you never." For example, do not say "you never do what I want you to do."

Before generalizing, stop and think about whether the statements are true. Also, do not bring up past conflicts in order to change topics and stir up negativity. These actions prevent conflict resolution.

Character Attacks

Sometimes people use their partner's negative actions to point out personality flaws. For example, if a husband left his socks in the floor, his wife may look at it as a character flaw and label him inconsiderate or lazy. Or, if a wife wants to discuss a relationship problem, her husband might label her needy. Character attacks create negative perceptions from both perspectives of the relationship. Remember to respect the other person, even if you do not like their behavior.

Forgetting to Listen

Forgetting to listen is an important factor in all of the previous six conflict contributors. During a conflict, some people interrupt, roll their eyes or rehearse their own response instead of truly listening and attempting to understand their partner. Not listening prevents you from seeing your partner's point of view, and prevents your partner from wanting to see yours! Don't underestimate the importance listening and empathizing with the other person.

Centerstone (615) 460-HELP (4357)

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), a not-for-profit organization is the nation's largest provider of community-based behavioral healthcare. With a history that spans over fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to more than 69,000 individuals of all ages and their families annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs in more than 120 facilities and 150 partnership locations in Tennessee and Indiana. Centerstone is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) in Tennessee and The Joint Commission in Indiana. For more information about Centerstone, please call toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.