

## Relationships - dealing with conflict

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With the physical and emotional closeness of a partnership, it is inevitable that there is sometimes conflict. It is often a sign that something is wrong or that someone is unhappy. Avoiding conflict or ignoring the problems could mean that you are choosing to avoid talking through important issues or exploring the underlying reasons that have caused the conflict.

### **Conflict creates anger**

Anger is the feeling that often accompanies conflict situations. When you feel angry, you might:

- Express your anger through a physical or verbal outburst. This might make you feel better at first but you will probably feel guilty later. This can damage the relationship, especially if your partner is afraid of your anger.
- Deny your anger. Ignoring anger from conflict means ignoring the signs that something is wrong in the relationship. This may solve the problem for a while but it creates greater problems in the future.
- Acknowledge your anger (without trying to hurt the other person either emotionally or physically). This is the most constructive response to anger and is more likely to lead to a positive resolution.

### **Work through the issues**

When you choose to acknowledge your anger, you can then take steps to resolve the problem as quickly and calmly as possible:

- Admit that you are angry and let your partner know how you feel by bringing the problem out into the open (without trying to hurt them).
- Give yourself 'cooling off' time if you feel that you or your partner are too angry to talk about the problem. Remember to come back to the issue later and try to sort things out.
- Explore your true feelings. Conflict is usually the end result of a build-up of underlying feelings and unresolved issues.
- Listen to your partner's point of view. There are two sides to every story.
- Acknowledge and take responsibility for your part in the problem.

It is also important to reflect together on what you can learn from conflict. This helps to strengthen your relationship and lessen the chances of a similar conflict happening again.

### **Be prepared to forgive**

When you have resolved the conflict, be prepared to forgive and make up with your partner. Let them know that you are ready to put it behind you and move on. Often this can lead to a deepening of understanding and intimacy in a relationship.

### **Where to get help**

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors Tel. 1800 806 054
- Relationships Australia Tel. 1800 817 569
- Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP), Australian Government Tel. 1800 050 321

### **Things to remember**

- Conflict is an inevitable part of any relationship.

- Ignoring anger from conflict means ignoring the signs that something is not right in the relationship.
- Aim to acknowledge and deal with your anger in a constructive way.
- Avoid actions or words that may hurt your partner.

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Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA)

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