
Relationships - dealing with conflict

Summary

- 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.
 - If you are experiencing abuse or violence, seek help immediately.
 - Avoid actions or words that may hurt your partner and take responsibility for hurt that your behaviour has caused when this occurs.
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With the physical and emotional closeness of a partnership, it is inevitable that there is sometimes conflict. It can be 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 for the conflict.

It's important to recognise the ways in which you are different from each other and consider how you can make room for this in your relationship.

Conflict creates frustration and anger

Frustration and anger are feelings that often accompany conflict situations. When you feel frustrated or angry:

- You might express your feelings 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. Acknowledge when you have gone too far and upset your partner.
- You might 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 can create greater problems in the future.
- Anger can be healthy when expressed in non-destructive ways.
- Try to 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.
- Try to remember that physical or emotional outbursts are abusive behaviour and not acceptable. If you are experiencing abuse in your relationship, seek help. Family violence interventions include services to help with violence or abuse issues in relationships, including counselling for couples at risk of violence, assistance to secure the safety of victims of family violence, and therapy for those who use abuse and violence. Services include:
 - **1800 RESPECT** - National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service Tel. **(1800 737 732)**
 - **WIRE** – free information, support and referrals for Victorian women, nonbinary and gender-diverse people Tel. **1300 134 130**
 - **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre** – supporting women and children to live free from family violence Tel. **1800 015 188**
 - **Men's Referral Service** - offers assistance, information and counselling to help men who use family violence Tel. **1300 766 491**
 - **Kids Helpline** – free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 Tel. **1800 55 1800**
 - **MensLine Australia** – 24/7 online and phone support and information service for men and boys dealing with family and relationship difficulties.

Work through the issues

When you choose to acknowledge your feelings, 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 or your partner 'cooling off' time if you feel that you or they 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Note: The suggestions in this section are not intended for people experiencing family violence. If you are living with family violence, seek help. You have the right to be safe. Read more about **family violence services in Victoria**.

Where to get help

- **Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA)** - National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. **(03) 9486 3077**
- **Relationships Australia** - services include counselling, mediation, dispute resolution, relationship and parenting skills education, community support, employee assistance programs and professional training. Services and programs are available nationally. Tel. **1300 364 277**
- **Family Relationship Advice Line** Tel. **1800 050 321**
- **1800 RESPECT** is the national sexual assault and family violence counselling service for people living in Australia Tel: **1800 RESPECT**
- **WIRE Free information**, support and referrals for women Tel. **1300 134 130**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Relationships Australia Victoria

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