



Conflict Resolution

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There is an acronym WAVE and it stands for:

Wait

Acknowledge

Validate

Empathize

Step 1. Wait. When a conflict begins tempers flare and that is the time to stop and wait until you have calmed down to talk about what's bothering you. You can take 20 minutes to two days but agree that no matter what you will talk about what is going on. When people are angry they are thinking through the fight or flight part of their brain called the amygdala. It's located in the primitive part of the brain that has to do with survival. When you calm down you are thinking through the frontal lobes in the part of your brain where compassion and understanding are. So, it's vital that you let yourself cool off, so you can think and talk more positively. No one ever settles arguments when they are angry.

Anger is a secondary emotion and is triggered by hurt, humiliation, guilt, sadness and/or pain. Anger is best seen as an indicator that something is hurting us. Anger lets us know that something is wrong; some internal land mine has been triggered. Think about what is making you angry but also what you may have done to make your partner angry. When you feel calmer and have taken some time to consider what may be causing the anger you can make a time to talk about what was upsetting. Anger is a complex emotion because it can be layered. There can literally be 5 different reasons why you are angry, and it takes time to find out what is going on at every level. Sometimes it's not really about anything and it just goes away once you have calmed down. All the more reason to give it time.

Step 2. Acknowledgment Acknowledgement lets our partner know that you hear them. When arguments escalate it's because no one is listening. Conflict escalates because your partner does not feel heard so they up the ante and say it louder. When your partner feels heard it de-escalates the conflict. Conflict and anger break the emotional connection. The best method for reconnection is to acknowledge what our partner is saying or feeling. Acknowledgement does not mean we repeat word for word but summarize our understanding in a way that communicates our sense of what they are feeling and thinking. Attack and defend style of arguing is a lethal style that loops around and around creating an emotional stalemate. Acknowledgement breaks the negative cycle. Acknowledgement does not mean agreement it simply means that you hear what is being said

Step 3. Validation. There is almost always a valid reason for why people get angry. Validation means that you understand why your partner is upset. During your talk after the cool down take some time to find out what is bothering your partner so you can validate their right to feel the way they do. Validation is way of communicating that you understand what your partner is experiencing. When couples are having trouble, it is often because they too busy defending to really hear what is being said. Try not to make assumptions without checking them out, take it personally, criticize or stonewall. Acknowledgement and validation break the negative cycle.

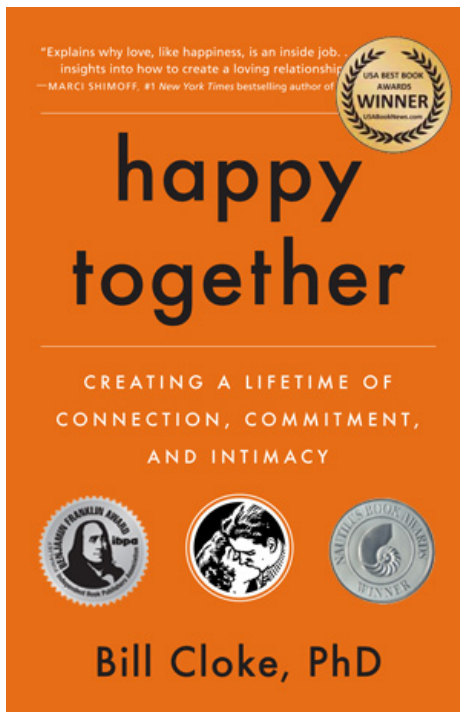
Step 2. Empathize. The most important activity you can engage in as you are calming down and allowing the anger to subside is empathy. Empathy can be described as “Vicarious introspection.” It is the activity of seeing what your partner is experiencing from behind their eyes. Empathy is not sympathy, it is objectively understanding what is going on from the point of view of the other. It goes both ways inward and outward and for both of you. Empathy involves looking, seeing and understanding both from within and between one another. Then you can each take responsibility for your part of the problem. Empathy is especially difficult because it is an abstract thought process and is part of knowing both yourself and your partner well. Take the time to get to know yourself and your partner as a means of creating empathic attunement.

4. Brainstorm about the Problem. Once each person feels understood and has tried to voice their concerns, you can make a statement about what each of you think the problem is. Something like: "When you ignore me, I get angry and then you get angry with me. I think the problem is that we are spending too much time arguing about what happened instead of talking about what we want and need from each other moving forward." Once there is an agreement about what the problem is start brainstorming for possible solutions. "In the future if I tell you that I feel ignored, start by letting me know that you understand instead of getting angry with me. Then let me know what you need, and you hear me." By placing solutions in a future context, you can focus on results rather than criticism and blame. Communication works best when you talk about your own feelings, wants and needs moving forward as opposed to what your partner is doing wrong. When you feel criticized you feel trapped in a bad place you can't get out of instead of offering a future based solution where you can succeed. Solution focused discussions are the best way to resolve disagreements and conflicts.

Step 5. Make a Plan. At this point each person can make a statement about what they will do next time. "I promise to listen to you, so you won't have to yell to be heard." Develop an overall plan of action. Break it down into workable parts. What is each person going to do to improve their behavior? There are no good guys or bad guys, each person has a part to play in the problem and in the solution. If you can see what you are doing to create the problem, it enables you to understand what both of you can do to make it better.

Step 6. Take Action and Get Feedback. Trying to do those things that have been agreed upon demonstrates a commitment and concern for the needs and feelings of your partner. When they can see you trying to do those things that you have agreed to it creates more love and intimacy. This is how conflict resolution can be a source of intimacy. At this point it's important to provide feedback as to how the plan is going. Take time to talk about the positive aspects and then work towards considering what will improve the process. Being compassionate, understanding, respectful are the key processes in conflict resolution. If you are not doing one of these you are off track.

It is of paramount importance that you understand that the way you treat your partner during conflicts can either create love and understanding or break the connection and destroy trust. The health of relationships is dependent on positive conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is reliant on of each person looking at themselves first to understand what they specifically can do to make the relationship work better. Your concern, respect and caring for one another, your ability to place the love you have for one another at the center of any discussion or conflict will create more harmony and positive solutions. All resolution begins with self-reflection, moves toward a willingness to listen, and ends with compassion and empathy. This is a roadmap to follow. Clearly life is very complex and there are no perfect solutions but knowing where you are going and what direction is best will create shorter conflicts and more positive outcomes.



More insightful information on solving conflicts and relationships in general can be found in Dr. Cloke's book: ***HAPPY TOGETHER: Creating a Lifetime of Connection, Commitment, and Intimacy*** available for purchase online at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

“*Happy Together* explains why love, like happiness, is an inside job. Dr. Bill Cloke gives great insights into how to create a loving relationship that lasts.”

— Marci Shimoff, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Happy for No Reason*

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