

## Teacher Background Notes for Marital Conflict Resolution

### DO NOT TRIFLE OVER TRIVIA

The following items are typical behaviors that create stress between people. Read through the list and see if you know anyone that deals with these kinds of situations.

1. Which way the toilet paper rolls.
2. Turning down page corners instead of using a bookmark.
3. Eating or not eating in bed.
4. Leaving damp washcloths scrunched in a lump, or wringing them out and spreading them to dry.
5. Doing the laundry regularly or when there is nothing left to wear.
6. Putting the VCR tapes away or leaving them on top of the VCR.
7. Whether or not you read the instructions before you use something or put something together.
8. Whether the toothpaste should be used from the bottom up or from the top down.
9. Whether or not you are going to spend the holidays with your in-laws.
10. Whether or not you tear off the pillow tag that says DO NOT REMOVE!

These scenes may sound silly to you. Problems caused by trivia such as this is only the surface result of more serious problems. BUT, these are the very things that begin to get on one's nerves in a marriage.

So when you have disagreements, whether big or small, how does one resolve them?

### WILL WE EVER ADJUST?

Below is a list of ways people solve problems. Some of these techniques are good, some are bad, but most relationships involve the use of all of them.

#### COMPROMISE—Joint decision

Compromise involves both people giving in and finding a satisfactory agreement. The resolution will include some of the views of each person.

1. Neither person has to make a major sacrifice.
2. The solution contains ideas from all parties involved.
3. Companionship is enhanced.
4. There is no winner or loser.

#### ACCOMMODATION—Both maintain their own view

An accommodation is when both people agree to disagree. They accept each other's differences and do not let them develop into major problems.

1. Each person recognizes the right of someone else to believe differently.
2. Although differences remain, they do not break down the relationship.

#### CONCESSION—One person gives in

To concede means to give in. This means one person gives all while the other person gives all. This is not the best way to resolve problems.

1. Allows one person to win.
2. Communication and bargaining takes place.
3. Both parties must be willing to live with the decision.
4. The loser knows he/she will have a chance to win at another time.

MARTYRDOM—One person always gives in

Martyrdom is when one of the partners is conflict-shy and will do anything to avoid conflict.

1. One person always gives in.
2. Relationships deteriorate.
3. There is no respect for the person who always gives in.
4. Not a satisfying solution to anyone.

ONGOING HOSTILITY—Neither person will give in

This is when a couple lives in a constant state of disagreement, quarreling, and bickering.

1. Fighting is constant.
2. Tension occurs frequently and is expressed destructively.
3. The relationship deteriorates.
4. No decisions or resolutions are made.
5. Hostility spreads to many areas of the person's life.
6. Other people do not enjoy being with hostile people.

Divide students into groups of 2. Have them discuss and write down conflict resolution techniques for various situations. Or have students come up and Role Play the various situations using the different methods. Or have students describe how the couples would resolve their conflict using some of the various methods listed above.

Show the Following Video Clips about Constructive Marital Conflict Resolution

<http://www.work911.com/communication/video/audpartic.htm>

<http://www.work911.com/communication/video/audpartic1.htm>

In marriage, as with other relationships, the goal in conflict resolution is finding a win-win solution where both partners needs are met. Using the standard conflict resolution model will allow that to happen. One needs to remember to be fair and look for a win-win solution. Let go of your ego and allow yourself to look at the issue from your mate's perspective.

John Gottman, a marriage relationship expert in "Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, has a game which test the ability of "letting your partner influence you. He calls it the "Gottman Island Survival Game. (pg. 123-126)

Let students play "survival game" and debrief by answering questions at the end of the game. Scoring is based upon how well you were able to get along and let your partner influence you.

The activities below from "Still More Activities that Teach" by Tom Jackson could be used to illustrate principles about Conflict Resolution. Use the activities and discussion guide to emphasize your points depending upon your time.

Pg. 52 Blow Hard

Pg. 117 Here's What I saw

Pg. 177 Problem Attack

Pg. 197 Shoe Size

Pg. 207 Story Teller

Pg. 237 Trading

CAN THIS MARRIAGE BE SAVED?—Each month the *Ladies Home Journal* has an article called "Can This Marriage Be Saved?". Place students in pairs and give each an article to read. You may wish to use the same article for the entire class or have a different article for each pair. Have them read each side of the conflict, then write their advice to the couple for correcting the problem.

They may then read what the marriage counselor suggested. This exercise could be repeated with different articles. CAUTION: These articles should be previewed before allowing students to use them in class. Some content may be inappropriate for the classroom. A new book "Can This Marriage Be Saved?", ISBN 1-56305-628-3, Workman Publishing, New York, is now available. It is a compilation of articles from *Ladies Home Journal*.

Now, many of these same articles are available online at <http://www.lhj.com/lhj/love/>

Browse this website for quizzes, slide shows and good articles from many years of publication and marital advice.

Other sources of real life Marital Conflict Resolution Scenarios are found in the book "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work", by John M. Gottman, or [www.drphil.com](http://www.drphil.com).