

A good listener won't interrupt unless it's to clarify a point being made; shows genuine interest; realizes there is such a thing as nonverbal communication; tries to slip into the shoes of others to see from their perspective.

But being able to express your feelings is important, too. However, in negotiating your differences you're not trying to win points in a debate or to outdo the other person. Use what are called "I" statements: not, "You made me angry," but, "I feel angry when..."

## CONFLICT AT HOME

Home may be where you'll experience many of your conflicts. Disagreements over child rearing, sex, finances, and other aspects of family life can be managed successfully. Even the youngest members of the family can learn how.

To help their children find nonviolent ways of resolving differences, James and Kathy McGinnis of St. Louis taught them a three-step process:

- Express your "wants" clearly.
- Listen to other people's wants.
- Come up with alternatives.

McGinnis recalls one dispute between his five-year old and his three-year old over who would ride the tricycle. One was on the trike and the other was blocking its movement. He asked the children if they were happy with the impasse. They weren't and he asked what they could each do to change that. "We could take turns," said the five year-old, adding, "for 10 minutes each." When McGinnis said he'd be willing to tell them when the time was up, the three-year-old volunteered to let her older brother go first.

In trying to settle differences, keep in mind that the "other side" is a real person with real feelings, concerns, needs and views – someone made in God's image and deserving of respect.

"...walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing one another in love, careful to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace..."

(Eph 4:3)

## THINGS TO TRY

**Talk to the other person:** Be sure no one is being misquoted or misinterpreted.

**See the conflict as a joint problem:** The aim is to tackle a troublesome issue – not each other.

**Collect information:** as much as you need.

**Note areas of agreement:** even if they're minor it's better to establish early on that you can agree.

**Avoid the attitude:** that something is "only emotional".

**List alternative solutions.**

**Understand basic needs:** Try to settle differences in a way that respects the needs we all have for safety, security, love, knowledge, a sense of belonging, esteem, etc.

**Be concerned with the common good.**

**Seek the help of a neutral party:** when embroiled in a heated conflict, but remember that people are more likely to stick to a solution they had a hand in creating.

**Pray together:** if possible; if not, pray for a softening of hearts.

## DIALOGUE: THE BETTER WAY

"If you come at me with your fists doubled, I think I can promise you that mine will double... but if you can come to me and say: 'let us sit down and take counsel together and, if we differ, understand why it is that we differ' we will find that we are not so far apart after all, that the points on which we agree are many – if we only have the patience and the candor and the desire to get together, we will get together".

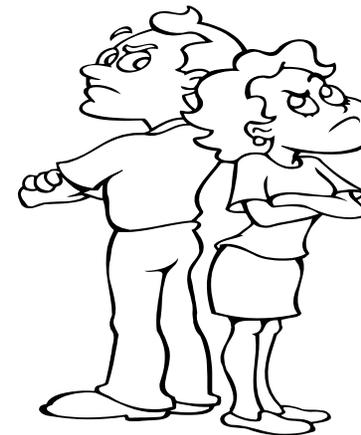
Woodrow Wilson

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**CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF DALLAS**  
**MARRIAGE MINISTRIES**

# CONFLICT

## WHAT'S BAD ABOUT IT?



# CONFLICT

## WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT IT?



**CONFLICT!** While most of us would rather avoid it, the fact is that we are surrounded by conflict.

Conflict is universal, inevitable – and as old as human-kind. It begins when your needs, wants, values and ideas clash with the needs and values of others.

- Should a window be raised for fresh air or lowered for warmth?
- Should the family vacation at the beach or in the mountains?
- Should you major in music as you would like or in business as your parents suggest?
- Should a new landfill be located on this side of town or the other?

The word “conflict” comes from the Latin “conflictus,” meaning striking together. In this striking together there is potential for progress as well as disaster, for growth as well as hostility.

In and of itself, conflict isn’t the problem. It becomes a problem when it is rooted in selfishness (“I want what I want when I want it”) rather than in an effort to find ways of working out differences together.

It is inordinate concern for self that leads to the bickering, resentment and even the death of love that is so often the byproduct of conflict.

But conflict is not all bad, something to be avoided at all costs. Jesus, for instance, didn’t shun conflict. Indeed, he was often surrounded by it, challenging even the religious establishment by healing on the Sabbath.

### WHAT’S GOOD ABOUT CONFLICT?

Picture a life devoid of challenges, or differences of opinion, or opposing ideas, or a variety of goals – a life without conflict. Things would be pretty dull.

An argument, a disagreement, a conflict between individuals or groups can be a positive experience when it...

- Motivates you to draw on your untapped abilities and develop new skills.
- Encourages you to find new ways to deal with problems.

- Stimulates your interest in community and world affairs.
- Forces you to clarify your views or reexamine your positions.
- Promotes personal growth.
- Clears the air and brings you closer to others.

### ...AND WHAT’S BAD ABOUT IT?

As good, and even healthy, as conflict can often be, it can also cause a lot of pain. Left unresolved or handled poorly can...

- Result in hurt or bad feelings.
- Intensify anger or dissatisfaction.
- Cause excess stress.
- Spill over from family life to your job or vice versa.
- Create rifts between people.
- Escalate from relatively minor incidents to major problems.
- Lead to physical violence and even to war.

The difficulties and even dangers inherent in unresolved conflicts make it a “must” to find creative and amicable ways to manage everyday grievances.

### WHEN EVERYONE’S A WINNER

It feels good to settle a conflict so that everyone wins. Roger Fisher and William Ury suggest a positive way of dealing with disagreements in their book “Getting to Yes – Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.” Called “principled negotiation,” it works, they believe, whether you’re negotiating a family dispute, a contract or a peace settlement.

#### Consider these ideas:

- **Cool down the emotions:** In separating the people from the problem, ideally, you’ll argue about the problem and not attack others or their motives.
- **Identify the real issue:** Focus on the underlying interests, not just the stated positions.
- **Be imaginative:** Together, look for options. Come up with a wide range of possible solutions to benefit all.
- **Be objective:** Depending on the situation, agreements can be reached using “objective criteria” such as fair market value, moral standards, scientific judgment and precedent.

#### In settling conflicts, the aim ought to be to:

- **Avoid a contest of wills:** (We’ll go where I want for dinner or stay home!)
- **Avoid breaking up relationships:** Neighbors who stop speaking because the “resolution” of their dispute left everyone feeling resentful. Try for a compromise.
- **Avoid timid compliance:** In order to preserve a relationship, one person makes all the concessions.

### WHAT’S YOUR STYLE?

When faced with disputes, differences, conflicts – how do you deal with them? Avoid them? Compete with the other person? Accommodate? Compromise? Collaborate?

Actually, it’s okay to use any of these styles depending on the situation. Marlene Wilson in “Survival Skills for Managers” says, “The key word is flexibility.”

Completely avoiding problems usually doesn’t work, although on the job people will sometimes try to avoid direct confrontations. However, Marilyn Moats Kennedy, a consultant and author, believes it might be better to face the issue head on.

Nevertheless, she says, “You’ll get better results talking privately over coffee or outside the workplace than standing in the hall, loudly arguing your position.”

Here are some “don’ts” to think about if you want to make it more likely that people will at least consider your side:

- Don’t put others down.
- Don’t yell.
- Don’t practice one-upmanship.
- Don’t make the other feel foolish.

***Do to others as you would have them do to you.***  
(Luke 6:31)

### THE BASIC REQUIREMENT

Basic to all successful conflict management is the willingness and the ability to communicate. When you are willing and able to express your thoughts and feelings – and to hear others express theirs – you’ve taken a big step.