

Managing Conflict

When conflict gets in our way it really messes us up. True, some kinds of conflict we cannot avoid. However, effective management of the conflict is what's most important. Conflict need not escalate into vitriolic or belligerent behavior. Conflict need not reach the point of physical confrontation of any kind.

In intimate partner relationships, conflict can be ugly, but it does not have to cause life-long pain. In the book *Empowering Couples* by Dr. David Olsen, he outlines five conflict resolution styles especially in relationships. Here they are:

First, are the PURSUERS. These are those who seek to create connections so they can become more intimate and closer. Because talking and expressing feelings is important to them, they tend to feel rejected by their partner if the partner wants more space. When the partner . . . in their lives withdraws, pursuers will tend to pursue more intensely."

Second are the DISTANCERS. These persons tend to be emotionally distant. They often manage stress by retreating into their work and may terminate a relationship when things become too intense. They are less likely to open up emotionally when they feel they are being pursued.

Third are the UNDERFUNCTIONERS. These persons typically have several areas in their lives in which they just can't seem to get organized. They tend to become even less organized when under stress. They have difficulty displaying their strong and competent side in intimate relationships.

Fourth are the OVERFUNCTIONERS. They are quick to advise and help out when others are having problems. They often have difficulty showing their vulnerable, under functioning side.

Fifth are the BLAMERS tend to react to stress with emotional intensity and combative behavior. This is when it can get messy and sometimes harmful to others. They like to change others and to put others down in order to make themselves look good.

Blamers are usually people who have been constantly shamed by their significant others during childhood and in adult relationships. Hence, when blamers they verbally put down others, they feel powerful. In fact, their anger can make them feel invincible.

Here's another perspective. What determines how one manages perceived or actual conflicts is first how one feels about him or herself. In other words, predictors of healthy conflict management and even crime prevention are two profoundly important aspects of emotional intelligence. First, the proper development of **INTRApersonal intelligence**—the understanding and managing yourself effectively. Second, the proper development of **INTERpersonal intelligence**--understanding and relating effectively with people. One author elaborates on intrapersonal intelligence with the following statement: "Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to acknowledge, value and manage your feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, laying the groundwork for meaningful relationships and productive teamwork. It is also the ability to recognize and diagnose the emotion of others and the ability to respond appropriately to emotional cues."

I am strongly suggesting that when a conflict escalates into serious physical confrontation it is usually evidence of lack of intrapersonal intelligence. In addition, the person would have allowed over time, the feelings of rage and resentment (negative forms of anger) to be dictators of one's behavior. It's a dangerously powerful feeling that can only be harnessed if there is proper INTRApersonal intelligence.

The place where poor intrapersonal intelligence is created is in the home. Its roots are in poor parenting skills. Many parents shame and blame their children more than praise them. Or, children might observe the way their

parents managed conflict and model that behavior. Children do not have to see parents physically fighting or even cursing each other to learn poor conflict resolution skills. They may only observe the constant ignoring of important unconditional loving and acceptance. They could hear or see negative accusations, ill treatment of others, disrespect of private property, poor time management, taking advantage of others, dishonesty or a serious lack of integrity. They can observe cold treatment of close relatives and abuse of neighbors. All of these and more can impact one's own personal view and how he or she relates to oneself—internal communication. This sets the foundation for interpersonal relationships—social relationships.

Parents, the non-violent future of our country is in your hands.

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