

Conflict in Marriage

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Two of the great joys in the counseling ministry I do for our parish community is working with engaged couples in their preparation for the Sacrament of Matrimony and with married couples experiencing especially difficult challenges in their relationship. Even in the most stable and loving relationships, one of the greatest trials is the resolution of conflict.

Any satisfied, seasoned married couple will tell you: ALL relationships experience conflict. The mere presence of conflict is not an indication of an unhealthy marriage. It is the intensity, duration, and ability to resolve differences and move forward that helps us discern whether or not a relationship is in crisis and in need of healing. Here are a few ideas to consider as you look to improve the way you and your spouse resolve difficult issues:

1. Listen: communication begins and ends with listening to each other.
2. Listen for understanding: listening is not simply about hearing the words another speaks. Listening for depth of understanding means being ATTENTIVE to the other, what they are saying, but more importantly for what they may not be able to express openly.
3. Express yourself and your perspective in as matter of fact way as possible, recognizing that the disagreement is with someone you love and is trying to hear and understand you.
4. Take a time out: nothing is resolved in heated emotion. If you cannot discuss, take a break, calm down, then return to a discussion.
5. Pray: prayer and reflection need to be woven into the fabric of our daily lives. Our culture seems to value immediacy and action. However, action without reflection is impulsive and seldom leads to wisdom.
6. Work until a solution is CREATED, that can be satisfying to both of you. (NB: I did not say compromise. Compromise inevitably leads to disappointment and smacks of competition. Competition is not healthy in relationships.)
7. Forgive: Jesus tells us, “The heart of the law is mercy.” Forgiveness leads to reconciliation and restores the dignity that is wounded in conflict.

Remember, these ideas are for your prayer, reflection, and consideration. You can receive great blessings from other couples whose relationships you highly respect by engaging them in a discussion.