

# How to Handle Conflict

How to Confront Conflict  
in a Caring Way

**Teacher Manual**

By Dave Batty



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## **How to Confront Conflict in a Caring Way Teacher Manual**

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Special appreciation is offered to several sources that provided major influence on the materials included in this course. *Living Free Ministries*, Chattanooga, TN; *Caring Enough to Confront*, by David Augsburger; and *Integrity* by Henry Cloud. See pages 18-20 for a full listing of resources.

Our website offers additional details on other training available.

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# How to Handle Conflict

## How to Confront Conflict in a Caring Way

### Overview

We will look at three different aspects of handling conflict

1. What is your attitude toward conflict?
2. What does the Bible say about conflict?
3. How do you respond to conflict?

### Key Truth on confronting conflict:

We are most useful in confronting conflict when we are not so much trying

to change another person as we are trying to help them see themselves more

accurately.

### What is your attitude toward conflict?

1. Conflict is not sin.
2. When someone causes conflict, they are not necessarily sinning.
3. Conflict is     Normal  
                      Neutral  
                      Natural  
                      So Accept it!
4. Learn how to accept conflict as a tool of God,  
not a trick of the devil.

5. Conflict can be creative tension.
  
6. Conflict can lead all involved to a clearer understanding of the will of God and a more effective life.
  
7. A biblical approach to resolving the conflict requires all parties involved to actively work for solutions that are filled with hope for all.

**How do you respond to conflict?**

**How does your spouse respond to conflict?**

**How does your teen (and other children) respond to conflict?**

**What are some of the typical ways people respond to conflict?**

## **Five Options for Dealing with Conflict**

There are different styles of responding to conflict. Conflict management styles are learned, not inherited. You can change your conflict management style. Jesus used each of these different styles of responding to conflict.

### **1. Competing: I win—you lose**

- a. Mark 3:1-6 Healing man with withered hand
- b. Matthew 21:12-13 Jesus cleanses the temple

### **2. Avoiding: I want out, I'll withdraw**

- a. John 6:1-15 When the crowds tried to make him king

### **3. Accommodating: I'll give in for good relations**

- a. Mark 5:1-20 Healing demon possessed man in Gadara
- b. John 4:1-38 (v. 16-18) Samaritan woman at the well

### **4. Compromising: I'll meet you halfway**

- a. Matthew 21:23-27 His authority questioned

### **5. Collaborating: I can care and confront**

- a. John 8:1-11 (v 7, 11) Woman caught in adultery

Every one of these conflict management styles can be used effectively in a positive, biblical way—given the appropriate situation.

However, each style can also be used in a manipulative, destructive way.

## Personal assessment of your past experiences with conflict

Rate each one on a scale of 1 to 10.

- \_\_\_ 1. How big of a problem has conflict been in your life?  
1=small problem    10=big problem
- \_\_\_ 2. Growing up as a child & teen, how often was conflict a part of your life?  
1=conflict was rare    10=lots of conflict
- \_\_\_ 3. How much pain did conflict cause in your life?  
1=little pain    10=lots of pain
- \_\_\_ 4. How much damage did conflict cause in your life?  
1=very little damage    10=lots of damage
- \_\_\_ 5. How big of a problem has conflict been in your family life over the past 3 years, especially as it relates to your teen daughter?  
1=small problem    10=big problem

## Basic tools for handling conflict

### A. “I” messages vs. “You” messages

“You” messages tend to increase conflict by enhancing the other person’s defense mechanisms. These messages cause the other person to feel put down, rejected or unimportant.

Examples of “You” messages

- You just don’t care.
- You are a problem.
- Can’t you ever do anything right?
- You are so stupid!

“I” messages are more effective than “you” messages. “I” messages tell what you feel and how the other person’s behavior is making you feel. This type of message helps to communicate your feelings regarding the other person’s behavior and its effect on you without strengthening the defenses of the other person.

“I” messages deal with facts versus evaluations and judgments. It helps to communicate honesty and openness. “I” messages are less likely to cause harm in the relationship. The self-esteem of the other person is not attacked. An “I” message is different from a “you” message in that you take responsibility for your own feelings.

Examples of “I” messages

- I feel angry because. . . .
- I feel that you don’t care because. . . .
- I feel hurt because. . . . .

In your family disagreements, how often do you use “you messages” vs. “I messages”?



**B. What is your level of listening?**

**Level 1. Focused on myself**

- a. Internal
- b. My thoughts
- c. My judgments
- d. My filters
- e. How it relates to me
- f. My interests
- g. My agenda

**Level 2: Focused on other person**

- a. Their feelings
- b. Their thoughts
- c. Their conclusions
- d. Their filters
- e. How it relates to the person I am listening to
- f. Their interests

**C. Ways of confronting conflict without being judgmental**      John 3: 17**1. Focus your feedback on actions, not the actor.**

This gives the person freedom to change his behavior without feeling personal rejection.

Example: “When someone criticizes people who are not present, as you were doing a moment ago, I get uptight. I’d encourage you to say what you have to say to the person.”

**2. Focus your feedback on observations, not your conclusions.**

Do not comment on what you think, imagine, or speculate, but on what you have actually seen or heard. Conclusions cause the other person to be defensive.

Example: “You are not looking at me and not answering when I speak. Please give me both attention and answer.”

**3. Focus your feedback on descriptions, not judgments.**

Do not comment on another person’s behavior as nice or rude, right or wrong. Instead, give a clear, accurate description in neutral language. When the other person senses that you are judging them, they often will break off open communication.

Example: “I am aware that your reply to my request for information was silence. Please tell me what this means.”

**4. Focus your feedback on ideas, information, and alternatives, not advice and answers.**

Do not tell the other person what to do, even if they ask, “What should I do?” They need to own the solution. Help them see all the facts that are relevant to the problem. The more options available, the less likely is a premature solution.

Example: “I have several other options that you may have thought about, but let me run them by you again.”

**5. Focus your feedback on what and how, not why.**

“Why” focuses on motives, and often leads to excuses and rationalizations. “Why” is judgmental. “What” and “how” related to observable actions, behaviors, words and tone of voice. Children under 12 are not able to understand intentions, so do not ask them “Why did you do that?” When they say, “I don’t know,” they are telling the truth.

Example: “Here is where we are, let’s examine it.”

**Key Truth on Confronting Conflict**

We are most useful in confronting conflict when we are not so much trying to change another person as we are trying to help them see themselves more accurately.

**Where do I need to start changing the way I respond to conflict?**



## Extra notes on your attitude toward conflict

### 1. Embrace conflict

Do not run from it. Do not be afraid to deal with the negative.

Does conflict stress you out?  
Stress depletes brain chemicals

### 2. My eyes are toward growth

Conflicts are the setting for problem solving—so we can grow!

God uses problems to teach us to rely on Him, not on ourselves

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 NIV

<sup>8</sup>We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. <sup>9</sup>Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup>He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.

If I'm not growing, I'm simply in a maintenance mode in life.

### 3. The essential need for respect toward other person, vs. responding with “you idiot!”

Make the problem the focus, not the other person.  
Deal with the problem without becoming the problem.

## Conflict with a healthy person vs. conflict with a dysfunctional person

What sets up a person to do poorly in handling conflict?

--bullies, abusers,

--Hurt people hurt others.

So what are you? Four options

1. You are healthy      and      The other person is healthy
2. You are healthy      and      The other person is unhealthy
3. You are unhealthy    and      The other person is healthy
4. You are unhealthy    and      The other person is unhealthy.

### Unhealthy person

1. Focuses on whose fault is it.
2. Blames others
3. You need to change!

(What percentage were you at fault?)

4. Makes excuses
5. I see myself as good
6. Denial
7. I care about me  
The bully

The martyr complex

### Healthy person

1. Focuses on how we can solve things  
What can I do to make it work?
2. Find acceptance and love in your  
weaknesses and failures.  
2 Corinthians 12:7-10
3. Take ownership of your own failures &  
imperfections.
4. Takes responsibility for the situation.
5. Give up on being perfect & work hard to  
improve.
6. Honest—not taking more or less  
Only taking the truth.
7. I care about you and me.  
Romans 12:1

We are to be a living sacrifice, not a dead one.

## The myth of Hidden Harmony

In the book, *When Talking Makes Things WORSE!* the author, Dr. David Stiebel, discusses a common myth people have when it comes to conflict.

“Deep down, we all agree. There is no conflict, only poor understanding. If only we understand each other, we’ll agree. The president’s twist on it was: If only you understand me, we’ll agree.”

Take a minute and think of the different conflict situations you have been part of recently. How often have you carried this idea, “If you would just listen to me, I am sure you would leave agreeing with me.”

This only works if the real cause of the conflict is a misunderstanding. If however, the conflict is rooted with a basic disagreement between the two parties involved, then talking will not solve it. In fact, the opposite may happen. The more they talk, the angrier they may become.

We can help overcome this myth of hidden harmony by coming back to our key truth: *We are most useful in confronting conflict when we are not so much trying to change another person as we are trying to help them see themselves more accurately.*

## How to confront conflict in a productive manner

### 1. Are you ignoring the white elephant in your living room?

### 2. You get what you tolerate.

If you do not confront conflict, and instead you tolerate problems, that’s what you will get—more problems.

Those who fail to confront leave success on the table, they allow problems to stop them.

### 3. You can confront well or you can confront poorly.

If you fail to confront, you lose.  
But if you confront poorly, you also lose.

**4. Confront in such a way as to preserve the relationship with the other person.**

1 Peter 4:8 NIV

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins..

**5. Stay connected with the person—conflict resolution is a process**

Two parts to this process:

- 1) Solve the problem
- 2) Focus on healthy living

**6. Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is giving up my demands on how this person should be punished for the wrong things this person did against me. I allow God to deal with this person.

To forgive does not mean this person can continue to sin against me.

To forgive is different than to restore the relationship.

To forgive does not mean I must trust this person.

Forgiveness enables me to move ahead with my life, and not be held back by my past.

Let the bad stuff go! Cancel the debt they owe you.

“People who have not ever really faced their own misdeeds, owned their own mistakes toward others, and received forgiveness and made amends rarely have forgiveness toward others. They still think they are morally superior and lord their superiority over the one who fail them in some real or imagined way. But if they have been honest about their own failures and been accepted for those, then they are more humble and able to forgive other imperfect people like themselves.” (Quoted from Integrity, by Henry Cloud, page 195)

**Where do I need to start changing the way I respond to conflict?**



## **Biblical Patterns for Resolving Conflict**

**1. Matthew 18:15-17**

**2. Galatians 6:1 (also vs. 2-5)**

**3. 1 Timothy 5:1**

**4. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:2**

## Resources on conflict

Caring enough to confront. David Augsburger (Regal Books, 1973, 1981).

Integrity: The Courage to Meet the Demands of Reality. Henry Cloud. Chapter 10, "Eating Problems for Breakfast," deals with conflict. (Harper Collins, 2006).

The Peacemaker, by Ken Sande (www.HisPeace.org)

Peacemaking: Responding to Conflict Biblically. This is a small group study guide and leader's guide by Jimmy Lee and Brad Rymer. (www.LivingFree.org, Turning Point, Chattanooga, TN, 2000) Based on the book The Peacemaker, by Ken Sande.

This small group study helps us understand conflict and our response to it. It also helps to see conflict as an opportunity to glorify God. This study contains methods of self-examination; it includes suggestions about when and how to confront someone. This study offers a biblical approach to negotiating and dealing with unreasonable people.

Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Roger Fisher and William Ury and Bruce Patton (Penguin Books, 1981, 1991)

Leadership. Rudy Giuliani. Chapter 12, Stand up to Bullies. (Mirimax Books, 2002)

When Talking Makes Things WORSE! Resolving Problems When Communication Fails. Dr. David Stiebel is the author of the book/audiobook. (Whitehall & Nolton, 1997).

## Other resources for further study

*Counseling for Relapse Prevention* by Terence T. Gorski & Merlene Miller (Herald House—Independence Press, Independence, MO, 1982).

*The Genesis Process: A Relapse Prevention Workbook for Addictive/Compulsive Behaviors*, by Michael Dye and Patricia Fancher. (Genesis Addiction Process & Programs, 25363 Rodeo Flat Rd., Auburn, CA 95602 Phone: 530-269-1072, web: www.genesisprocess.org)

*The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You: The Essentials of Christian Living*, by James G. Friesen, E. James Wiler, Anne M. Bierling, Rick Koepcke, and Maribeth Poole. Workbook also available. These can be ordered through CARE Packaging, 9731 S M-37, Baldwin, MI 49304, phone 231-745-0500.

Forgiving our parents, forgiving ourselves. David Stoop

Moving beyond the pain of the past. Sandra Wilson

Recovery for adult children of alcoholics and dysfunctional families. Sandra Wilson

Released from shame. Sandra Wilson

Forgive and forget. Lewis Smedes

The art of forgiveness. Lewis Smedes

The lies we believe. Chris Thurman

Compelled to Control: Recovering intimacy in broken relationships. J. Keith Miller. Health Communications, Inc.

Changes that heal: How to understand your past to ensure a healthier future. Dr. Henry Cloud. Zondervan.

Boundaries: When to say “Yes,” when to say “No,” to take control of your life. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Zondervan. A separate workbook is also available for this book.

Boundaries in Marriage. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Zondervan. A separate workbook is also available for this book.

Boundaries with kids. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Zondervan. A separate workbook is also available for this book.

Boundaries Face to Face: How to have that difficult conversation you’ve been avoiding. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Zondervan.

Another chance. Sharon Wegscheider

Anger is a choice. Tim LaHaye and Bob Phillips. Zondervan.

Safe People: How to find relationships that are good for you and avoid those that aren’t. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. Zondervan. A separate workbook is also available for this book.

Healing for Damaged Emotions. (Study guide included). David Seamonds & Beth Funk. Life Journey.

Looking good outside, feeling bad inside. Curtis Levang. (YWAM)

The following resources by Dave Batty are available at the website [www.iTeenChallenge.org](http://www.iTeenChallenge.org)

**Boundaries in Your Mind**

**Dealing With Shame:** How do I know if it is from God?

**Delusion, Denial, Deception:** Overcoming the trap of delusion, denial, and deception.

**Enabling:** Are you offering the wrong kind of help to your loved ones?

**Facing Your Problems:** The path to pure joy.

**Finding Hope:** Finding hope in the midst of life's problems.

**God's School of Life Training:** How good a student are you in God's school of life training?

**Living with Guilt:** Are you living with guilt that doesn't belong to you?

**Mending a Broken Heart:** What are the steps to mending a broken heart?

**Raise the Bottom:** You've heard, "They have to hit bottom before they get help." Why not raise the bottom?

**Renewing Your Mind:** How can a person get rid of inappropriate thoughts? How can you change the way you think?

**Returning to Joy:** Training your brain for the life skill of returning to joy.

**They Don't Want Help:** What can you do for your loved one when they don't want help?

**What are Your Triggers?** What are those things that trigger a response in your life? Do you let these triggers pull you down a destructive path?

**When People Hurt You:** How can you respond to those who betray or hurt you? Where does revenge fit in?

**When Will Your Miracle Come?** How can I receive a miracle from God?

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