

Session 6

CONFLICT

Getting Ready

Here's what you'll talk about:

- attacking and avoiding
- using conflict to strengthen your relationship
- keeping your hearts open

Survey Says...

Take a quick look at the Conflict Resolution section of your Couple Checkup report. Notice whether this is a “strength” or “growth” area in your relationship.

Selfie

Taking a Snapshot of Where You Are Right Now

Try completing the following survey in three minutes or less. Go with “off the top of your head” responses as much as possible. The point isn't to come up with “right” answers, but simply to start thinking about where you stand on some of the issues addressed in this session. You and your spouse-to-be should fill in your answers separately so that you can compare and discuss them later.

1. If you'd somehow managed to record a home video of your parents handling conflict with each other when you were growing up, which of the following would make a good title for the resulting movie? Why?

- American Sniper*
- Code of Silence*
- It's a Wonderful Life*
- Frozen*
- Fight Club*
- War and Peace*
- other _____

2. Which of the following do you think are healthy for spouses? Why?

- arguing
- throwing things at each other
- disagreeing
- giving your spouse the silent treatment
- telling a friend about a fight you've had
- sweeping a problem under the rug and ignoring it
- waiting until you're calmer to discuss a sensitive issue
- forgiving a spouse who hasn't apologized

3. In no more than 20 words, how would you explain to an extraterrestrial what "fighting" looks like in a marriage?

4. Which of the following statements do you think are true?

Why?

- Couples who yell at each other are healthier than those who avoid doing so.
- If you and your future mate frequently disagree, you're probably not meant for each other.
- If you don't resolve all your differences before marriage, you'll probably get divorced.
- If you stay angry at your spouse-to-be after sunset, ("Do not let the sun go down on your anger ..." Ephesians 4:26) it's a sin.
- Engaged couples should wait until they're married to discuss topics that might lead to an argument.

WeTube

Getting the Most from the Video

After watching the Session 6 video on the DVD, discuss the following questions:

1. All of the real-life couples and the experts in the video session said that conflict is inevitable—that it's an unavoidable and certain part of your marriage. How does this reality make you feel? Why?

2. Write down as many words as you can that come to mind when you hear the word *conflict*.

Are the words you listed more positive or negative? How did growing up in your family shape the way you view conflict? What are some words that you hope will describe conflict in your marriage?

3. In the video, John Trent paraphrased a passage from C. S. Lewis's classic work *Mere Christianity*: "This then is the great secret. Good and evil both grow at compound interest. That is why the small things you do each day are of such infinite importance. It is the small things that will turn you into either a heavenly or a hellish creature."¹ How might small frustrations and hurts become major problems down the road in your marriage? What does "keeping short accounts" have to do with conflict in your relationship?
4. Why do you suppose we usually hear so much more about the downside or negative aspects of conflict than the positive aspects? Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (NIV). What does this verse say

about conflict? Which of the following are potential benefits of healthy conflict in your marriage?

- It increases awareness of problems that exist in your relationship.
- You learn about your spouse—conflict reveals his/her true feelings, needs, expectations, or desires.
- Conflict helps you fix deficiencies or break ineffective patterns in your marriage.
- It gives you a chance to care for and empathize with your spouse.
- It can restore unity and oneness and help you work as a team.
- It can be very humbling—God only gives His grace to the humble.
- Conflict gives you great insight into your own personal issues.

It can bring you closer together as you seek to listen to, understand, and validate each other.

5. If you'd grown up as a fictional family member on one of the following TV shows, how would you probably be handling conflict these days? How does that compare with the way your parents handled disagreements?

- *Modern Family*
- *King of Queens*
- *Full House*

- *The Cosby Show*
- *Little House on the Prairie*
- *Downton Abbey*
- *The Brady Bunch*

6. You heard the Smalleys say, “Conflict is good; combat is bad.” What do you think they meant? What would be some examples of healthy and unhealthy ways of handling conflict?
7. The Smalleys say that when you get frustrated, hurt, upset, or angry—when you experience conflict—your heart closes like a roly-poly bug.² How could your fiancé(e) tell if your heart was shut down like that bug; what would be some of the signs?
8. Dr. John Trent said, “The stronger person should initiate peace in the relationship,” and he likens this to Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NIV). What do you think about this idea of the stronger person initiating peace? How might you act as the stronger person during conflict?
9. The Smalleys talked about the importance of taking a “time-out” to open your heart. Talk about how you will communicate to your future spouse that you need to take a time-out. Then, once you are in a time-out, what are some things that help you to calm down and get your heart open (prayer, listening to music, exercising, breathing, cleaning, etc.)? Make

a commitment to respect each other when someone needs a time-out. Finally, make a rule that whoever calls the time-out must get you back together to talk when both hearts are open.

10. If conflict in marriage is normal, and couples such as the Smalleys have learned to survive and manage and even benefit from it, why might it still feel scary to you right now? What kind of help would you like to ask God for as you face your own rough patches?

App(lication)

Taking Things Personally

How can you apply conflict resolution principles to a real-life conflict? This Action Step provides a way to start.

Here are three conflict management steps from Dr. Greg and Erin Smalley, found in Chapter 10 of the *Ready to Wed* book.

1. *Call a time-out.* Instead of continuing to argue and debate the situation, hit the pause button. In other words, get away from each other for a brief amount of time in order to de-escalate your stirred-up emotions. . . .

2. *Identify your emotions.* This next step is an important shift in what you're thinking about. When we're hurt and frustrated, our thoughts are racing with what the other person did or didn't do. This is called "stewing." We can't stop stewing about how

much we were wronged or mistreated. If we continue to think about “them,” we’ll stay stirred up. . . .

3. *Discover the truth.* Two of the biggest mistakes people make with their emotions is to either ignore them or act upon them. Remember, emotions represent nothing more than information. But we should never mindlessly act on any information without evaluating it first. The best way to evaluate your emotions or feelings (the buttons) is to take that information to the Lord. You’re searching for His truth. . . .

Now look at the following case study, based on a true story.

Case Study: The Garage Door Incident

When Maya came home from work today, she drove into the garage as usual and parked next to the silver Kia her husband, Anthony, always drove. She was looking forward to seeing him, and to finding out how things had gone at school for their third-grader, Elijah. She pressed the button to close the garage door as usual and walked into the house. About 15 minutes later she came back out to throw some junk mail in the garbage can. What she saw froze her where she stood.

The garage door had stopped about three-quarters of the way down, halted by Elijah's bright green bike. Fortunately, the boy wasn't on it—and it didn't seem damaged, other than a scrape on the left handlebar and a smaller one on the front fender. But the bottom panel of the aluminum door itself was crumpled. This had Very Expensive written all over it.

She knew Anthony would be furious, and when she finally told him what had happened, he was. It would cost hundreds of dollars, he said. They might even have to replace the whole door, which would run over a thousand. They didn't have that kind of money. "I'm not calling the door company," he said. "You're the one who did it."

Maya started to say something, something about how she'd been too tired and distracted to notice the bike, or how Elijah shouldn't have left it there, or how Anthony could at least be a little more supportive. But she didn't. She walked into the darkening backyard, leaned on the swing set, and burst into tears.

Pretend you're Maya. How would you apply the Smalleys' three conflict management steps? Then pretend you're Anthony. How would you do the same?

Face The Book

Going Deeper with Ready to Wed

To learn more about—and apply—the principles you've just discussed, please read the following in the *Ready to Wed* book during the week:

Chapter 10, "Fight Our Way to a Better Marriage," by Dr. Greg Smalley and Erin Smalley

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