

Guidelines for Managing Conflict

Read all of these guidelines. Choose 4 or 5 that you need to work on and write them in your notebook. If you have extra time, try to guess which ones your fiancé will choose. Compare with your fiancé and create a combined list.

1. Stick to the subject/no past history. Clarify what the actual conflict is. Don't dredge up the past. The better you know someone, the better you know his or her most vulnerable spots. Avoid the temptation to aim for those vulnerable spots during a fight.
2. Be honest but not hurtful. Don't say it if you don't mean it. Choose your words carefully. Strive to reflect honor in all your words.
3. Use "I feel" messages — I feel ____ (a feeling) + when you ____ (an action) + I want _____. "I feel annoyed when you don't call to let me know you won't be home for dinner. I want you to let me know when you are going to be late." Sometimes people begin feeling statements with "you" and this often puts people on the defensive.
4. No name calling. This includes using pet names sarcastically.
5. Remain calm and no physical violence — no violence or yelling, but don't use the silent treatment.
6. No third parties. While it is easy to drag family and friends into a conflict as a tiebreaker, don't do it. The only exceptions would be if you both agree that you need the help of a professional (counselor, financial advisor), or if you both agree to ask someone you know for advice.
7. Choose the time of your discussion carefully. Make sure you have enough time for open and honest discussion. Avoid times such as just before leaving for work, late at night, or just before someone is about to come over. Be sure to finish the argument even if you have to call a truce until you have time to think and pray about it and hold until a time that is more conducive to coming to a resolution.
8. Give each other equal time. Listen. Don't interrupt when your spouse is speaking. Give the other person a fair chance to express his/her feelings and opinions. Repeat back what your fiancé or spouse says without rebuttal or embellishment. If you can't do this, consider writing and dialoguing.
9. Maintain a sense of humor, but avoid sarcasm.
10. Avoid power statements and actions. "I hate you." "Sleep on the couch tonight." "Maybe I should move out." Never threaten to withdraw love or sex.
11. Avoid exaggerations or hysterical statements. Avoid using "always" or "never" unless you are going to say, "I will always love you and I will never leave you."
12. When you are wrong, admit it.
13. When you make up; mean it! Ask for forgiveness if necessary.
14. Hold hands to maintain tender physical contact.