

12. Time Urgency. I am not in danger. I do not need to rush. I will not hurry unless it is a true emergency. I am learning to enjoy doing my daily activities at a relaxed pace.

13. Disabling Performance Anxiety. I am reducing procrastination by reminding myself not to accept unfair criticism or perfectionist expectations from anyone. Even when afraid, I will defend myself from unfair criticism. I won't let fear make my decisions.

14. Perseverating About Being Attacked. Unless there are clear signs of danger, I will thought-stop my projection of past bullies/critics onto others. The majority of my fellow human beings are peaceful people. I have legal authorities to aid in my protection if threatened by the few who aren't. I invoke thoughts and images of my friends' love and support.

TOOLBOX 4

TOOLS FOR LOVINGLY RESOLVING CONFLICT

This is a list of techniques and perspectives I've gathered over the years to help couples resolve conflict as lovingly as possible. When I give it to couples that I work with, I ask them to take time at home to read it aloud together and to discuss each one as much as necessary to see if they can agree to adopt it as a guideline for handling conflict.

When I first got together with my wife eleven years ago, we spent considerable time on a weekend trip discussing these guidelines one at a time. We aired our concerns, enthusiasms, caveats and reservations about using them. Over subsequent years, we refined our usage of them, and have evolved a communication style around our conflicts that has helped to keep our intimacy healthy and ever growing.

1. Normalize the inevitability of conflict & establish a safe forum for it. Discuss and agree to as many of these guidelines as seem useful.
2. The goal is to inform and negotiate for change, not punish. Punishment destroys trust. Love can open the "ears" of the other's heart.
3. Imagine how it would be easiest to hear about your grievance from the other.
Say it as it would be easiest for you to hear.
4. Preface complaints with acknowledgement of the good of the other and your mutual relationship.

5. No name-calling, sarcasm or character assassination.
6. No analyzing the other or mind reading.
7. No interrupting or filibustering
8. Be dialogical. Give short, concise statements that allow the other to reflect back and paraphrase key points to let you hear that you are accurately being heard.
9. No denial of the other's rights as outlined in the Bill of Rights above.
10. Differences are often not a matter of right or wrong; both people can be right, and merely different. Be willing to sometimes agree to differ.
11. Avoid "you" statements. Use "I" statements that identify your feelings and your experience of what you perceive as unfair.
12. One specific issue, with accompanying identifiable behavior, at a time. Ask yourself what hurts the most to try to find your key complaint.
13. Stick to the issue until both persons feel fully heard. Take turns presenting issues.
14. No interrupting or filibustering.
15. Present a complaint as lovingly and calmly as possible.
16. Timeouts: If discussion becomes heated either person can call a timeout [one minute to 24 hours], as long as s/he nominates a time to resume. {See 1 below}
17. Discharge as much of any accumulated charge before hand as possible.
18. Own responsibility for any accumulated charge in the anger that might come from not talking about it soon enough.
19. Own responsibility for accumulated charge displaced from other hurts. {See 2 below}
20. Commit to grow in your understanding of how much of your charge comes from childhood abuse/neglect.
21. Commit to recovering from the losses of childhood by effectively identifying, grieving, and reclaiming them.

22. Apologize from an unashamed place. Make whatever amends are possible.
Include your intention to correct your behavior in the future. Explain your extenuating circumstances as evidence – not as an excuse - that you were not trying to be hurtful.

1. More on Timeouts, #16

Two of the most common reasons that relationships break up is irreconcilable differences and irreparable damages. The latter could have been prevented in many cases if couples knew how to use timeouts judiciously.

This is especially true for fight-type trauma survivors, who when flashing back, can easily lose control to the outer critic and say intimacy-destroying things. Survivors benefit greatly from learning to recognize the signs of being over-activated so that they can then take timeouts to stop the bleeding caused by a critic on the rampage.

Things said in the heat of a flashback can wound deeply and engrave themselves in the psyche of the other in ways that cripple trust. So much of this needless intimacy-destruction will be prevented if both members of the couple agree that either of them can call a timeout whenever they feel too triggered to be lovingly confrontive, or are experiencing the other as flashing back into being overly aggressive.

Timeouts can range from one minute to 24 hours depending on how long it takes either or both partners to achieve good enough flashback management.

Timeouts work best when the person calling them nominates a time to resume conflict resolution, so that timeouts do not become techniques for dodging issues.

Timeouts can be used individually as a time to release any accumulated charge. This can be done by using the safe "angering out" techniques I describe in chapter 5 of my book, *The Tao of Fully Feeling*.

2. More on Transference, #19 & #20

In using this list with couples, I notice that those who are most skilled in conflict resolution, have achieved significant skill with steps 19 through 21. These steps are about learning to handle transference.

For trauma survivors, transference is often a type of flashback whereby we unconsciously react to our significant others as though they were our childhood caretakers. When this occurs, we displace onto them a great deal of our unresolved childhood emotional pain.

One common example of this occurs when a partner's fair and minor complaint triggers a torrent of rage, fear and/or shame that is left over from decades of a parent's overwhelming and rejecting criticism.

Another instance of this occurs when her failure to say what he was hoping to hear stirs up the pain of decades of his aloof, detached mother or father's neglect. All gender combinations can of course fall into this trap.

The composition of most conflicts that I witness in my office eventually seems to be approximately 90% re-experienced pain from the past and 10% actual current pain. Harville Hendrix's

Getting The Love You Want, is a wonderful guide for working through this dynamic in a way that heals childhood wounds and enhances intimacy at the same time.

In my experience, the vast majority of conflicts between consenting adults involve a dynamic where both people play a part and have some responsibility for a disruption in their loving connection.

Truly healing resolutions to conflict typically occur when each partner owns their part and expresses an apology about their contribution to the conflict. For deep level resolution this usually includes an apologetic reference to your transference. A good apology sounds something like this of this: "I'm sorry for the amount

of charge I had in expressing my disappointment. While I believe I have a fair complaint, the intensity with which I expressed it was too much. I'm sorry I responded to you as if you were my constantly withholding mother."