



By Denise King Gillingham, MSW, CPCC

The "BIG C"... CONFLICT

Learning to resolve conflict is an important skill that will ultimately benefit many aspects of your life.



Perhaps it involves your children, or a neighbor, or something internal. It is uncomfortable and gnaws at you. You can ignore it, you can ruminate about it, but, until you get to the cause of it, you cannot move forward. What is it? Conflict.

Everyone experiences conflict. The sources are many, including annoyance, disagreement, competition, lack of awareness, and poor communication. Underlying the conflict is typically the sense that

something you value is under threat. This threat—perceived or real—leads to fear and suspicion, which stand in the way of a solution.

Sometimes conflict can be easily overcome. One day my husband and I were arguing about something, and we looked at each other and started to laugh because neither of us could remember what we were arguing about. Laughter ended that conflict, but sometimes things aren't resolved quite so easily. In those cases, consider implementing this easy, three-step plan for conflict resolution:

Step 1: Stop and identify the root of the problem.

This will serve two purposes: first, it will pause the action and allow you to resume control of your emotions; second, it will allow you to view the conflict objectively. When you become aware of and acknowledge your feelings, it is easier to put them to the side and view the situation objectively. Often, when you look at the bare facts, a situation seems very different from when it is fraught with emotion. When trying to get to the facts, here are some

Conflicts are also about change. Use the situation as a chance to grow. Sharpen your communication skills and think about another perspective. These skills will ripple through other areas of your life.

things that might be helpful to consider: What is really going on? When did it start? Who is involved? What is at stake for me? What does the optimal resolution look like?

Step 2: Try on different ways of resolving the issue.

Here is where you can play a little. Perhaps your conflict is with your partner over neatness. He feels that leaving a trail of clothing around the house is no big deal, whereas you spontaneously invite friends over and like the house to remain neat. Think about several ways of dealing with the situation and the consequences of each choice, keeping your desired outcome in mind. The most-effective resolutions are ones that consider the feelings of both sides. A resolution that satisfies only one side might resolve the immediate conflict but will create resentment that will fuel future conflicts. Usually, each person makes some compromises. Work through the scenario step by step. Try to anticipate feelings and reactions. Use your self-awareness and empathy and try it on—think of how you would feel if that solution were presented to you.

Step 3: Present your solution.

Now that you have clearly thought out the situation and have identified possible solutions, choose the most-effective scenario. When presenting a resolution, it is helpful to start by stating the common ground: for example, “It’s wonderful that we have such a comfortable home. That is important to both of us. We both enjoy spending time here.” Then bring up an area that needs improvement: “One area in which we need

to find common ground is housekeeping. I know that you like to relax at home and that can mean leaving clothes around. How would it be for you to just do that in your office or in our bedroom? Because I recognize that you are not as spontaneous as I can be, I will tell you before I invite friends over so that you have some warning.” Changes on both sides that keep each other’s feelings and desired outcomes in mind tend to be more sustainable.

Conflicts are also about change. Use the situation as a chance to grow. Sharpen your communication skills and think about another perspective. These skills will ripple through other areas of your life. ✿

Denise King Gillingham, MSW, CPCC, is a certified co-active coach who specializes in helping people achieve enduring life change through accessing their inner wisdom. Her international practice includes clients from all walks of life. Denise received her master’s degree in social work from Columbia University and has been a mental health professional for more than 15 years. She shifted her focus from therapy to coaching in 2006. Her professional experience includes private therapy practice in Prague, Czech Republic; crisis intervention with New York University; in-patient therapy at Payne Whitney Clinic in New York City; and substance abuse counseling at Bronx VA Medical Center in New York City. She develops and conducts workshops on emotional intelligence for organizations in the United States and Europe. Contact Denise at dkgcoach@gmail.com.