

Preparation for Conflict

Conflict, in its many forms, is a fact of life. From minor daily aggravations to major long-term tensions within the workplace or family, we are faced with personal conflict in our lives. Some conflicts can be worked out rationally, but others end up generating discord and anger. Some conflicts resolve themselves if we ignore them, but others grow in complexity and intensity if not addressed.

As children, we initially learn how to respond to conflict by watching how adults handle disputes. As we mature, we develop different strategies for coping with disagreements. Some of us thrive on the energy created by conflict and enjoy the clashes. Others hate discord and disagreements and avoid conflict at all costs. Most of us are somewhere between those extremes and our reactions depend on many factors such as these:

- Are we dealing with strangers, co-workers, friends, or family? How important is a continuing relationship with the people involved?
- Is the conflict strictly intellectual, or does it involve one of our emotional sore spots?
- How important is the issue to us? What will the long-term ramifications be?
- Is it a one-time argument, or is it a long-standing source of contention?
- How do the other people involved behave?

Dealing with conflict can have a spiritual dimension. Christianity teaches us to *turn the other cheek*. That is wise advice in many situations that are not especially important or that cannot be resolved. On the other hand, when we encounter harm being done to ourselves or others, avoiding conflict perpetuates injustice. What about the inherent worth of every human being? Should we have respect for those with which we clash, or have they lost the right to our respect when they engaged in discord? And just where does forgiveness and reconciliation fit into the settling of conflicts?

Below are a variety of thoughts for you to consider as you ponder the subject of conflict.

There are three ways of dealing with difference: domination, compromise, and integration. By domination only one side gets what it wants; by compromise neither side gets what it wants; by integration we find a way by which both sides may get what they wish. *Mary Parker Follett*

Conflict is drama, and how people deal with conflict shows you the kind of people they are. *Stephen Moyer*

Every conflict we face in life is rich with positive and negative potential. It can be a source of inspiration, enlightenment, learning, transformation, and growth – or rage, fear, shame, entrapment, and resistance. The choice is not up to our opponents, but to us, and our willingness to face and work through them. *Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith*

I don't like conflict. *Nigella Lawson*

The more we run from conflict, The more it masters us;
The more we try to avoid it, The more it controls us;
The less we fear conflict, The less it confuses us;
The less we deny our differences, The less they divide us. *David Augsburger*

True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice. *Martin Luther King*

Refuse to fight small battles with petty people. Life is bigger and better than that.
Amy Reese Anderson

My long experience has taught me to resolve conflict by raising the issues before I or others burn their boats. *Alistair Grant*

Conflict cannot continue without your participation. *Wayne Dyer*

Only by creating peace within our own mind and helping others to do the same can we hope to achieve peace in this world. *Geshe Kelsang Gyatso*

Questions to Ponder

1. How was conflict handled in your family of origin? How has this affected the way you handle conflict?
2. Do you find conflict energizing, nerve-wracking, or somewhere in between?
3. Think of times when you avoided a conflict. When was it appropriate and beneficial to not engage? When did it cause underlying problems to grow and become worse?
4. Think of times when you engaged in conflict. When did it help resolve a problem? When did it cause continued anger and divisiveness?
5. What strategies have you found to be helpful in dealing with conflict? What strategies intensify the conflict?
6. What personal traits can you cultivate that will help you deal with conflict more effectively?

Words of the Day

Before coming to the gathering, think of a few words, phrases, or metaphors that describe how you deal with conflict. The prompt for the Words of the Day activity will be to complete this sentence: “When faced with conflict I (am) ...”