

International Conversation Cafe

Lifestyle Topic: How to Resolve Arguments

First, the basics *From Difficult Conversations* by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen

When there is a conflict, there are three strategies to keep in mind.

1. **What Happened?** We usually want to understand what happened. How did the conflict develop? The idea here is not to establish who is right or wrong but to see the conflict from the other person's perspective.
2. **Intentions-** It is a mistake to assume you know why the person did what they did. The truth is that our intentions are usually mixed. If you find out what the other person's intentions were, you will be able to see the conflict from their perspective and then move forward
3. **Blame-** The idea is not to blame the other person for our personal feelings or behavior or for the conflict. The goal, in the beginning, is to find our contributions to the conflict.

Think about the last conflict you had with your roommate, siblings, parents, friends, or coworkers. Or think of a time when you observed a conflict between others, perhaps in a movie.

Was there any point where people blamed the other person for what went wrong?

Was there any time when people were angry because they assumed they knew why the other person did what they did?

How did these things hinder the conflict from being solved?

Second, the Method *From Ten Great Dates Before You Say, "I Do"* by David and Claudia Arp

In this method, only one person speaks at a time. The speaker holds the pencil. The person listening may only restate what the speaker says. Then the speaker passes the pencil to the listener who then becomes the speaker and the roles are reversed. Read through the rules.

1. Rules for the speaker who is holding the pencil.
 - a. Speak for yourself. Don't assume you know what the other person is thinking.
 - b. Keep the statements brief. Don't go on and on.
 - c. Use "I" statements; "I felt upset when the dishes were piled up in the sink and the food left on the table."
 - d. Don't use "you" statements; "You never...you always...you should."
 - e. Stop to let the listener paraphrase.

2. Rules for the Listener

- a. Paraphrase only what you hear the speaker saying.
- b. Don't rebut or defend yourself.

3. Rules for both

- a. When the Speaker has the floor, the Listener may not interrupt.
- b. The Speaker keeps the floor while the Listener paraphrases.
- c. Share the floor...take turns speaking. Pass the pencil to the Speaker when you switch roles.

4. Conclusion- After both parties have expressed their perspectives.

- a. Apologize where you are at fault. "I regret..... I am sorry, please forgive me." An apology does not include, "I am sorry but you made me do it, or I did it because...." An apology never blames the other person. It accepts the responsibility for the actions."
- b. Look for solutions that satisfy you both. "How can we solve the problem?"
- c. Ask each other the following questions if appropriate.
 - i. What do you need?
 - ii. What would you like to happen?
 - iii. What can we do better the next time?

Third, Your Turn

Let's say that one of you leaves their dirty dishes scattered about the kitchen for days on end. The other person is upset by it. Decide in your group which role two of you will take. The person upset by the dirty dishes will start the conversation by inviting the other person to talk. Begin in this way.

Speaker with the pencil- "I am upset by all the dirty dishes in the kitchen. Can you help me understand what is going on?"

Listener- Oh, so you are upset by my dirty dishes?

Speaker with the pencil- Yes.

Now the speaker gives the pencil to the listener who becomes the speaker, explaining why they have been leaving the dishes. The person without the pencil then restates what he or she hears.

This dialogue should continue until each person is ready to suggest a way to solve the conflict. The other members of the group should watch and correct the proceedings if necessary.