

# Repairing Connection

**Definition of conflict:** A conflict is a serious disagreement, clash, or prolonged struggle between opposing forces, interests, or ideas. It stems from the perceived incompatibility of goals or needs and can occur internally (within an individual) or externally (between people, groups, or nations)

A few important things to remember:

- All relationships have conflict
- Conflict can be managed
- Conflict is not a failure in a relationship
- Successful relationships use conflict as an opportunity to increase understanding, strengthen trust and deepen connection.

So, the goal is not to eliminate conflict, the goal is learning how to do conflict and repair well. It is the absence of repair that is most damaging to relationships, not our mistakes.

## **4 Horsemen:** Criticism, Defensiveness, Contempt & Stonewalling

These show up when:

- We have unprocessed resentments/wounding
- Nervous system activation (Fight, Flight, Fawn, Freeze)
- H.A.L.T.S (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired, Stressed/Sick)
- We are emotionally or physically spent

When we move out of our window of tolerance repair is much more difficult and sometimes impossible.

## The Recovery Process

### Step 1: Pause & Regulate

Practice self-awareness in conversations and notice when your signs and symptoms indicate that you're beginning to move out of your window of tolerance or when you've begun to shift into using the 4 horsemen.

Now, pause, ask for a break and set a time when you'll check back in with each other to finish the conversation.

Come back to your window of tolerance:

- Use your coping skills
- Time matters, you need 20-30 minutes without rumination.
- You may need hours in order to get your 20-30 minutes and that's okay!

Once you're calm, present, and feeling capable now is the time to move back into discussion and repair.

One of the easiest ways to lower our defenses and stay grounded is to remember that **you and your person have one very important common goal: To remain connected.** Start the conversation here by acknowledging this.

### Step 2: Take responsibility

When you continue the discussion, each person can share uninterrupted for 2 minutes at a time.

The question you are attempting to answer is: **How did my behavior contribute to the escalation or deterioration of the interaction?** You do not need to answer this question perfectly, you just need to make a beginning. Here are a few examples.

"Here is what I wish I would've done differently..." "I got defensive." "I said I was okay and I wasn't."

"That came out wrong." "I raised my voice." "I interrupted." "I made assumptions"

In between shares, the listener is going to use the feedback model to be sure they heard and understood the other person's emotional experience and needs if any were shared.

Once the person sharing has indicated that they feel understood, then the other person can share for two minutes and the cycle repeats until the conversation comes to a natural conclusion, or you take time for a pause.

### **Step 3: Seek to understand**

Express **curiosity** about the other person's feelings or experiences:

"Tell me more about that..." "How did that impact you?" "What did it remind you of?"

"What did you need or what do you need from me now?"

You are not looking to solve the other person's emotions, you are offering support and witnessing them. **Understanding does not require agreement.** We are listening to support not to judge.

Continue to listen in two minute increments to one another in this step as well, also continuing to use the feedback model between shares.

### **Step 4: Validate**

This is part of offering support. You've practiced listening and got curious and now it is helpful if you let the other person know that you understand them and you see their process. (If you don't yet understand, ask more questions from step 3 till you can reach some understanding.)

"I can understand why or how you felt that way."

"That makes sense from your perspective."

"I see how that impacted you."

"Your emotions and experiences are important to me."

### **Step 5: Reconnect**

How do we move forward together?

Here you can make plans, plan adjustments or commitments to one another as you work through the situation.

Again, continue to use the two minute goal when sharing and listening.

The last step, although equally as important as the others, reconnect. That can look different for everyone and so checking in with one another about how you're feeling and what you need is important. Please don't assume, ask your person.

Some examples;

Quality time together, Taking a walk, Enjoying a game, Verbal or physical affection, Moving back into the normally daily routine by making a meal or tending chores