

4 Spirit-Led Ways to Diffuse Fiery Conflict in Your Marriage

“You process faster than I do, and you talk more quickly than I do, Deb. So if you want to win, you’re on a roll. But if you want to walk away with the best solution—one we can both support, we need to slow this conversation down and really listen to one another.” Ron was throwing out a challenge. And his frustration was evident.

Our intense moment of fellowship had come to a screeching halt. I was faced with a choice. Do I want to win? Or do I want the best solution?

I thought about it for a minute. Mine is the best solution. Therefore, I win! It was not my finest hour. Thank goodness he couldn’t hear the voice in my head.

The old saying “All’s fair in love and war” is baloney. Dangerous stuff. All so that you can make your point, snatch the prize, and come out the winner in the moment. If there’s a winner, there’s a loser.

And you don’t want to be married to a loser, do you? I didn’t think so.

In that tense moment of conflict with Ron, good judgment nudged out my need for a speedy decision. We adopted his suggested approach and slowed it all down. The need for a fast resolution wasn’t required; the house wasn’t on fire. But it was my preference. In fact, it’s my conflict style.

One of the most valuable lessons to come from that interaction was the realization that we are not wired alike when it comes to conflict. And over the years we’ve learned to determine how

to deal with our differences. So let's take a look at . It's one of our best conflict resolution tools.

D = Don't take the bait.

We all know how to push our mate's buttons. And it's underhanded when that occurs. Remember you have a choice: You can *react*, returning evil for evil and hook your honey into an all-out brawl, or you can *respond*, refusing to take the bait and continue without the drama of "You always!" and "You never."

E = Explain the impact of the behavior and express your expectations.

This can be hard to do if that bait is still dangling. Help your spouse recognize and understand the impact of the conflict on you, the situation and the relationship—and be clear about your expectations for the conversation. It's important to honor God and one another with a commitment to respectful communication.

A = Ask questions to create dialogue.

Open-ended questions require more than a one-word answer. The purpose of this part of the discussion is to draw your spouse into solution-building, with the goal of a joint decision. It may sound like this:

- "If the positions were reversed, how would you feel?"
- "Help me understand why you decided it was acceptable to ... ?"

You may discover information you were unaware of, changing the way you view the issue. Or not. Either way, you are beginning to build a solution together. Eventually, steps will surface and you can start creating a plan.

L = Let go of the need to control your mate's behavior and manage your own.

"This conversation is not about me controlling you. I'm here to control me." Even if you never verbalize this, don't ever forget it. We have our hands full trying to manage our own behavior. You can recalibrate the tone and direction of the conversation if you remember this simple principle.

It's also important to remember that Christianity is not a psychological process; it's supernatural, a spiritual process in which our marriage is designed to exist. And while skills, tools and approaches to equip us to deal with conflict effectively are vital in building our understanding, our agreement, and ultimately our life together, we cannot do it apart from the reality that, without His Spirit to guide us on the journey, we will fail.

"Bear with one another and forgive one another. If anyone has a quarrel against anyone, even as Christ forgave you, so you must do" (Col. 3:13, MEV).

Deb DeArmond is a highly-experienced and sought-after executive coach and an expert in the fields of leadership, communication, and relationship and conflict resolution. Deb is the co-founder of , a website for Christian women 50+. She is the author of *Related by Chance*, *Family by Choice* and *I Choose You Today*. Her latest book is *Don't Go to Bed Angry, Stay Up and Fight*, written with her husband, Ron.

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