

Managing conflict

Conflict is a normal part of life, and if our relationships are to survive, we need to know how to manage them.

Most people tend to fall into three groups when dealing with conflict: Peacekeeper, Validator or Passionate, as identified by relationships expert John Gottman.

The Peacekeeper often avoids discussions that lead to disagreement, believing it best to accept a situation rather than change it. They try to deal with things on their own and may not feel the need to share everything with a partner.

Validators embrace the concept of togetherness in all things. Validators want their partners to be their best friends and spend most of their time with them. Validators need to share their feelings and it's important that they listen to their partner and are listened to.

Passionates confront issues head on. They are direct and honest, regardless of whether a partner's feelings may be hurt. They are comfortable with anger or frustration because they like debate and will try to persuade a partner to their point of view.

It gets interesting when we look at which styles occur in couples. You may think that having two Peacekeepers together is ideal, but though they will have little outward conflict, each may feel lonely because not much new knowledge is learned about the other over the years, leading to a reduction in intimacy.

Intimacy can be defined as "detailed knowledge". This is the kind of couple who suddenly divorces after 30 years together.

Two Validators may strike trouble because they are so intent on being fair they lose all romance, though they may remain good friends.

Two Passionates may have lots of excitement, but too many arguments and not enough calm.

The pairing of opposites changes things completely.

But don't feel gloomy. Whatever your conflict style, the answer is simple. Take the time to recognise and understand your partner's style of conflict so you can see it as their style, rather than who they are.

Concentrate on the issue causing conflict, rather than getting side-tracked by the way your partner deals with it. Find strategies to deal with the conflict that allow you to talk safely about issues.

Survival tips

- **Conflict is normal in relationships**
- **Learning to recognise our own and our partner's style of conflict is useful**
- **Don't run away from conflict. Find a strategy that enables you to talk it through with your partner to ensure a healthy relationship that lasts.**