

## COMMUNICATION / CONFLICT RESOLUTION AGREEMENT

Whenever conflict occurs in our relationship, we commit to use the following guidelines to work through it and reach a point of resolution and synergy or yielding.

1. I will communicate directly my state of anger toward you as soon as possible after I become aware of it.
2. While I express my anger I promise not to attack you, in response to my anger
3. I will choose to think of our differences and disagreements as an opportunity for continued growth and intimacy in our relationship, not as a personal threat or something harmful and destructive to our relationship together.
4. I agree that every anger situation must be owned by both of us and worked through by both of us, not as a personal weakness in either of us, or the one who is angry, but as a function of our total relationship.
5. I will speak only from my own personal perspective, I will not assume what your feelings or thoughts might be unless I ask for them and you express them to me. I will not read your mind.
6. I will use responsible “I” messages, and avoid accusative “You” messages that keep us on the defensive and not focused on solving the problem.
7. I will stick to the topic at hand. I will enter into the “museum of past” personal hurt or injustice only when it is the topic at hand.
8. I will not attack or criticize you when you share your personal inner feelings. I will continue to respect you and the trust you place in me to do so.
9. I will be proactive by taking responsibility for my actions, thoughts, and feelings in this relationship and avoid blaming.
10. I will continue to be your friend, lover, and loyal companion, even in the midst of our conflicts
11. I will respect your temporary time out and you agree to state a time at which you are willing to return to attempt to resolve our conflict.
12. I will not threaten you either directly or covertly.
13. I agree that physical or verbal abuse is not to be tolerated.
14. I agree not to use the children as a weapon, pawn or ally in our marital conflict.

15. I agree to work together on parenting the children presenting a united front.
16. I will share my out of family experiences at a higher level with you.
17. I will set aside \_\_\_\_\_ a day to visit with you with no conflict or problem solving allowed during this time.
18. I will respond to you honestly and directly.
19. I will seek win/win solutions to our problems and conflicts.
20. I will seek first to understand, validate, and mirror back my understanding of you before I attempt to get you to understand me.
21. I will seek synergy rather than compromise, taking what is and tuning it into the best it can be.
22. I will try to change only me and when I become aware of trying to change you, I agree to stop.

### **CLEAN FIGHTING**

Clean fighting attempts to resolve the problem by finding a mutually agreeable solution. Concern for the relationship is put before concern for self.

Have fair, mutually agreeable rules.

Realize that conflict will be inevitable, and ask yourselves “do we both want to fight fairly?” if not, you will find yourselves in a power struggle. But if you do want fair rules, you will have to mutually agree on them. Talk about talking, what is “fair” and “unfair” for each of you; what are the “off limits” areas such as past mistakes, in-laws, or other touchy areas; do you both agree to avoid the “dirty fighting” techniques? You must decide if you want Resolution and Restoration, or Revenge.

Use common sense regarding timing, outsiders, and physical condition.

Getting into something when there is not enough time to deal with it properly is frustrating and usually accomplishes nothing. It is like a game of “hit and run”, which only results in hard feelings. If you do inadvertently find yourself in this position, consciously agree to postpone it until a specified time later, and then come back to it and finish it. If you have ever been caught in the middle of someone else’s disagreement, you know what it feels like to be an “outsider”. Involving neighbors, children, friends, or any innocent bystanders in your fight is not only uncomfortable but is unproductive as well. The old adage which states “Never fight when you’re tired or hungry” is a very appropriate one. It seems that we are particularly vulnerable at these times, so keep that in mind. You will also want to consider your physical condition, if you are ill or not feeling well, little things may take on unnecessary importance.

Take ownership of your thoughts, opinions, feelings, and behavior. Make I statements rather than you statements. Take responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, & actions. Rather than blaming the other person, you might say “I feel rejected because you won’t talk to me” Use the format I feel (whatever the emotion ) because (the behavior).

Stick to behaviors, not personalities. Make a distinction between the person and what they do. Accept the person. Approve or disapprove of the behavior. Describe what it is that is bothering you rather than using name calling, sarcasm, or some judgmental statement. “When you don’t call if you’re going to be late, I get very worried” is better than “You inconsiderate oaf” Using “I” messages can be an effective beginning in most instances. Stop to think of what specific behaviors you are having trouble with and how you feel about them, then communicate that.

Good communications goes both ways. You should allow each other to fully express his or her point of view. State feeling, not judgments. It is especially important that both parties be willing to listen to the other person openly, without prejudging what is said. If you approach any conflict with a judgmental attitude you are putting your partner in the position of having to defend him or herself, and you also are making a judgment or assumption that may not be accurate. “Sometimes I feel left out,” would be a better expression of a certain feeling than “You really don’t care about me at all”

Restate your partner’s point of view. Be sure you both understand the meaning of the words you use. Remember that what you say and what you mean are often different. Be sensitive to your partner’s reactions to what you say, for they will reflect the meaning that is getting across. This should help you to define the problem and possibility to understand your partner’s point of view and feelings.

Define the problem. You may have to work through some preliminary side issues before you arrive at the real problem, It may be that the first point of view was just a smokescreen, and that the real problem will come to the surface by restating the other’s point of view. “Do I understand you right: You would like us both to go out of town this weekend instead of having me go hunting?” It is important that both partners be honest, loving, and understanding in order to establish the real problem.

Stick to the issue. Sometimes we have a tendency to throw in some of the “old” wounds that were never completely healed (“you forgot my birthday you know”) These side issues usually just cloud the real problem and should be tabled for the moment until the current issue is settled. “I’m sorry I forgot your birthday, but it really doesn’t have anything to do with the problem. Let’s talk about that later.” Would be a good way to handle a side issue.

Do not hit below the belt. When you live intimately with another person, you soon learn that person’s particular vulnerabilities. It may be tempting to “hit back” or hurt

if you have hurt - and you know just how to do it. Resist this temptation. You will regret lashing out in a spiteful and hurting manner, for those words can never be unsaid once they are spoken. No matter how many times you might say, "I'm sorry for what I said" if you have really struck at a vulnerable point, the hurt will remain. Your words have the power to destroy and a destroyed relationship is very difficult to put back together again.

Be prepared to synergize. Some people give lip-service to the idea of synergy, but watch for an opportunity to retaliate in their own way. Your synergy should represent a real willingness to meet the other person half way, not just to have "peace at any price." If both partners "compromise" but continue to feel that "I am really right", the result will be just a temporary truce and the "battle" probably will resume at a later date with new ammunition. When both parties are willing to synergize, the solution may be one of mutual acceptance and increased mutual respect. Remember the goal is resolution.

Be willing to go the extra mile. There are many instances in any human relationship where someone must go the second mile, and there are many second miles to be walked in a successful marriage. It will sometimes be the husband who walks them and sometimes the wife. When both are willing to do this, there is a kind of sharing that raises the marriage relationship to the highest of happiness.

### **DIRTY FIGHTING**

Dirty fighting takes place when a person is more concerned about winning the argument than in solving the problem. The focus is preservation of self instead of preservation of the relationship. Dirty fighting may win the battle, but will lose the war.

#### Types of dirty fighting:

1. The gunnysacker or stamp collector: Person stores up feelings instead of dealing with anger or resentment when it is felt. They collect these feelings until the "sack" cannot hold any more. Then, with "I've had it" or "That's the last straw" a barrage gets under way. A whole month's hurt feelings & hostility get dumped on the other.
2. The chain reactor. This person brings up things which have nothing to do with the present issue. By reminding the other person of things which were done or left undone ages ago, the issue is sidestepped & the attack pyramids.
3. The comedian. Refuses to take the fight seriously, laughing at the other person, making a joke, or avoiding the conflict by saying, "You're so cute when you're mad".
4. The martyr. Attempts to change the other person's behavior through guilt, hoping the other person will feel responsible for his/her "pain". "Go ahead without me - it's ok- I'll stay here" - and then a big sigh.
5. The Armchair psychiatrist. This person attempts to read the other person's mind, telling why that person is doing what he or she is doing, or telling the other person, "What you really mean is..."

6. The irritator. The irritator expresses resentments by doing something which really bugs the other person: leaving dirty dishes on the table or piled up in sink, leaving toilet seat up, cracking gum loudly, or some other irritation.
7. The withholder denies what the other person wants – affection, company, approval, sex, or any of the things which make life more pleasant for the other person.
8. The evader avoids confrontation by refusing to fight, getting “lost” in work, falling asleep, walking out or leaving, are methods that are often used.
9. The humiliator uses intimate knowledge of the other person to “hit below the belt” By going right for the sensitive or “out of bounds” area, the fighter scores points by hurting and “getting back” at the other person.
10. The professor attempts to change the other person by lecturing from their vast knowledge. I got the answer approach.
11. The lobbyist uses volumes of words and time to influence the other person to accept their opinion and position or simply to give up. In short, they filibuster.

---

Partner	Date	Partner	Date
---------	------	---------	------

---

Witness	Date
---------	------

Charles A. “Skeet” Stokes, MS, LPC, LMFT  
Roswell Therapy Group  
500 Sun Valley Dr  
Suite c-1  
Roswell, GA 30076  
770-640-9242 770-640-9287 fax  
[CharlesAStokes@yahoo.com](mailto:CharlesAStokes@yahoo.com)

### Stopping Trigger Thoughts

**Accepting personal responsibility:** No one “makes “ me angry. I choose it or allow it. I can choose alternatives to anger.

- Avoiding the “should’s”: People never do what I think they should, only what’s rewarding and reinforcing for them.
- Shoulds’ are my needs & values pushed on someone else.
- People do what they need to do, not what they should do.
- I can’t expect people to act the way I want them to.
- People don’t do what I think they should, only what their values & needs dictate. Others are not obliged to meet my expectations.

**Avoiding the fallacy of fairness:** It is merely a problem that our needs conflict: he or she is not wrong and I am not right.

**Avoiding assumed intent:** Forget right & wrong. Our needs are equally important. We can negotiate

- I don’t guess at the motives of others  
No mind reading

**Avoiding magnifying:** No more always and never.

- Accuracy, non-exaggeration.

**Avoiding global labeling:** No global labels or over-interpretation. Be specific

**Avoiding blaming:** Everyone chooses his or her highest good.

- Everyone makes the best choice possible.
- People do the best they can, given their level of awareness at the moment of choice.

### Sticking to the Task

- Ask him or her for a solution. Work for compromise.
- How can I negotiate for what I want?
- Stick to the facts, *no putdown or attacks*.
- Use “I” statements only, not: “you need to – ought to”...
- Let’s try a cooperative approach. Maybe we’re both right.
- Negatives lead to more negatives. *Look for solutions*.

## **Coping with Arousal**

- No sarcasm, “Getting mad will cost me \_\_\_\_\_”
- Anger is a signal of what I need to do. It’s time to cope.
- Remember your relaxation techniques.
- Take a deep breath and relax
- When my muscles get tight. It’s time to relax and slow things down.

## **Coping with the Angry Person**

- I don’t need to prove myself or to doubt myself.
- For someone to be that irritable, he must be quite unhappy, misguided, etc., but I’ve acted this way in the past myself. Lighten up.
- I can’t change him with anger. I’ll just upset myself.
- I don’t like it, but he’s using the best problem-solving strategy available to him right now.
- I won’t be manipulated into blowing up or losing my cool.
- Blowing up only gives them what they want
- Insist on seeking solutions. If this goes on. I’ll withdraw from the conversation.

## **When the Problem is Unresolved**

- Identify your negative self-statements and dispute or replace them by telling yourself positive alternatives. Substitute the following terms: “that misguided individual,” “that fallible human being,” “that complex person with negative and positive qualities,” “its inconvenient, but I can stand it,” I would very much prefer it, but I don’t absolutely need it.”
- I’ll get better at this as I get more practice.
- Can I laugh about it? It’s probably not so serious.

## Check list for Couples Dialogue

There are now three reasons why one might want to have a Couples Dialogue:

1. You want to be listened to and understood
2. You are upset about something and want to discuss it.
3. You want to discuss a topic that you think might be “touchy”

SENDER	RECEIVER
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The one who wants to <i>send a message must take the initiative and says, “I would like to have a Couples Dialogue. Is now okay?”</i></li> <li>2. <i>Sends Message</i></li> <li>3. <i>Continues sending message until completed.</i></li> <li>4. <i>Listen to summary &amp; give accuracy check</i></li> <li>5. <i>Listen to validation.</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>It is the RECEIVER’s job to grant a Couples Dialogue ASAP...<u>now</u> if possible. (If not now, set an appointment time so that the sender knows when she/he will be heard.) “I’m available now”.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Mirrors, “If I heard you right” or “If I’ve got it right, you said...” (paraphrase the sender’s message)</i>   <i>Accuracy Check: “Did I mirror you accurately?” or “Did I get it?” If SENDER accepts, then say, “Is there more about that?”</i></li> <li>3. <i>When the SENDER has finished sending, the RECEIVER summarizes all of the SENDERS message with this lead-in: Let me see if I got all of that...” Check for accuracy</i></li> <li>4. <i>Validates: “You make sense, because...” and then state the logic of the SENDER’s point of view.</i></li> <li>5. <i>Empathizes: A lead-in sentence might be: “I imagine you might be feeling...” or “I imagine you might have felt... or “I can see you are feeling...” (if feelings are obvious)</i>   <i>You must make some guesses as to what the SENDER is or was feeling. Feelings are stated in one word (i.e.: angry, confused, sad, upset,</i></li> </ol>

<p>6. Listen. If RECEIVER did not get the feelings right or did not get all of the feelings, share with RECEIVER.</p> <p>7. Once all three parts are completed, switch roles</p>	<p>etc.) If your guess entails more than one word it is probably a thought (“you feel that you don’t want to go with me.” This is a thought, not a feeling. Also, one never knows for sure what another person is feeling. Therefore check out your guess by saying: Is that what you are feeling?” or “Did I get it right?” If the SENDER shares with you other feelings, mirror back what you hears. Then inquire, “Is there more about that feeling?”</p> <p>6. Then mirror what is said.</p> <p>7. When the RECEIVER has gone through all three parts (mirror, validation, and empathy) then she/he says, “I would like to respond now.” Then there is switch and the RECEIVER now becomes the SENDER</p>
--	---

To help others better understand you: follow this format when communicating your feelings.

- I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (feelings word)
- About \_\_\_\_\_ (situation)
- Because \_\_\_\_\_ (reason)

Refrain from saying, “I feel like,” or “I feel that.” These statements express a thought or belief, not a feeling.

Do not say, “I don’t know” as a feeling word. Do not say, “It doesn’t matter, “ or “I don’t care.”

Do not say, “I am proud of you,” but rather say, “I feel proud about \_\_\_\_\_ Because \_\_\_\_.” Specifics are more important than you may think.

DO NOT talk, at, preach to, or teach one another. This causes others to close off and not hear a word you say.

DO NOT talk for others. Communicate your feelings and only yours. Keep the focus on yourself and how you feel.

If you stick to your feelings and truly express them, you will see how powerful this tool can be. Remember feelings are necessary for relationships.

### What is expected of me?

- Becoming responsible for my actions is expected!
- Be honest, authentic, and real.
- Active participation is expected during groups. This includes body language & eye contact.
- No attacking or demeaning another person’s character.
- Raise hand to speak. Speak one at a time as called on by the facilitator.
- Everything discussed in group is confidential. “What you see hear, what you hear here, remains here”
- When you are being spoken to, you may not respond to defend yourself or return confrontation to the person speaking to you for 24 hours.
- During general sessions, you must stand when relating. If someone wants to give feedback or relate to you, you must stand also. Standing is not necessary during teaching sessions.
- Raise your hand when you can relate to what is being said.

<b>Happy</b>	Daring	Hysterical	<b>Hurt</b>	Shameful	Uptight
Calm	Determined	Insecure	Aching	Somber	Weak
Carefree	Encouraged	Nervous	Afflicted	Sorrowful	Weary
Cheerful	Heroic	Panicky	Crushed	Sympathetic	
Comfortable	Independent	Shaky	Despair	Worthless	
Complacent	Loyal	Shocked	Distressed		
Contented	Proud	Terrified	Heartbroken	<b>Anger</b>	<b>Miscellaneous</b>
Ecstatic	Reassured	Timid	Injured	Annoyed	Bored
Elated	Secure	Wishy-washy	Isolated	Awkward	Cruel
Enthusiastic			Lonely	Belligerent	Distant
Excited	<b>Interested</b>		Offended	Bewildered	Envious
Exhilarated	Absorbed	<b>Doubtful</b>	Pained	Bitter	Jealous
Glad	Concerned	Defeated	Pathetic	Enraged	Messed-up
Grateful	Curious	Distrustful	Suffering	Frustrated	Phony
Hilarious	Engrossed	Dubious	Tortured	Fuming	Preoccupied
Inspired	Excited	Evasive	Upset	Furious	Torn
Joyous	Fascinated	Hesitant	Worried	Grumpy	
Jubilant	Inquisitive	Hopeless		Indignant	
Lighthearted	Intrigued	Indecisive	<b>Sad</b>	Inflamed	
Merry	Sincere	Perplexed	Ashamed	Infuriated	
Optimistic		Pessimistic	Blah	Irate	
Peaceful	<b>Eager</b>	Powerless	Concerned	Irritated	
Playful	Anxious	Questioning	Depressed	Offended	
Pleased	Avid	Skeptical	Disappointed	Provoked	
Relaxed	Desirous	Suspicious	Discontented	Resentful	
Satisfied	Earnest	Unbelieving	Discouraged		
Serene	Enthusiastic	Uncertain	Dismal	Physical	
Spirited	Excited	Wavering	Dreadful	Alive	
Surprised	Intent	Unbelieving	Dreary	Breathless	
Thrilled	Keen		Embarrassed	Empty	
	Proud		Flat	Feisty	
<b>Affectionate</b>	Zealous		Gloomy	Hollow	
Aggressive			Heavy-hearted	Nauseated	
Appealing	<b>Afraid</b>		Ill at ease	Paralyzed	
Close	Alarmed		Low	Repulsed	
Loving	Apprehensive		Melancholy	Sluggish	
Passionate	Cautious		Moody	Stretched	
Seductive	Fearful		Mournful	Strong	
Tender	Frightened		Quiet	Taut	
Warm	Horried			Tense	
				Tired	

## Boundaries

Page 12

(Adapted from the book Boundaries – When to say Yes, When to say No, to Take Control of Your Life, by Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, Zondervan Publishing, 1992)

1. **A boundary is a property line.**
  - It defines where I end and where I begin
  - It defines a sense of ownership, responsibility, and stewardship.
  - It defines me – what is me and what is not me.
  
2. **Examples of boundaries are:**
  - Skin (knowing and living like my body is my own)
  - Words (truth; using our words to show who we are and what we desire)
  - Geographical Distance
  - Time (Limiting time spent in some activity)
  - Emotional Distance
  - Accountable Relationships (authentic relationships that keep us walking in truth)
  
3. **Functions of boundaries:**
  - a. Boundaries keep the good in and the bad out.
  - b. Boundaries define where our responsibility begins and ends
  - c. Boundaries help us withdraw in times of danger.
  - d. Boundaries protect our freedom.
  
4. **Boundaries are about my choices**
  
5. **Boundaries are not about controlling or punishing other people.**
  
6. **Symptoms of boundary problems are:**
  - Clinical Symptoms** => depression, resentment, rage/anger problems  
Obsessive/compulsive behavior
  
  - Relational Symptoms** => loss of freedom (one who can't say "no" in relationship with one who can't hear "no" or a manipulator who defies boundaries indirectly), and loss of love (because of fear)
  
  - Functional Symptoms** => inability to complete a task or follow through, extreme disorganization, fatigue, problems concentrating
  
7. **Laws of Boundaries**
  - a. **Law of Sowing and Reaping**
    - We should not reap the consequences of someone else's sin.**
    - In relationships without boundaries, somebody sows but someone else Reaps.**
    - We can interrupt or suspend this law if we rescue people from the consequences of their choices.**

**b. Law of Responsibility**

People without boundaries create immature people who feel entitled.

Can I freely give this to them without resentment or compulsion?

Is this something they can do for themselves?

What is the fruit of my love? (Rescue or Maturity)

When I rescue a teenager or adult from his choices, I am not loving, I am hating.

**c. Law of Power and Powerless**

I must learn what I can and cannot change.

I cannot change anyone else.

I can submit myself to God's process of healing and transformation.

We must grieve our wish to control other people

**d. Law of Motivation**

Am I motivated by fear, resentment or compulsion?

I will not grow because I am not free.

Boundaries are about freedom. If I am not free, I cannot love.

**e. Law of Pain**

I must distinguish between hurting someone and harming someone.

When we allow a person to experience pain, we help him see that the hurt is due **to his** choices.

Expect anger and guilt messages from others.

**f. Law of Exposure**

It's not enough to have boundaries on the inside.

If boundaries are not communicated, God cannot heal.

If you are not communicating your boundaries properly, you will grumble (the language of resentment), explode and or be victimized.

