



**“We’re Always  
Fighting”**

**Anger and Conflict Resolution**

## **Conflict: Why Do You Argue, Why Do You Fight in Conflict?**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Think about the last time you had a conflict with someone and you argued - with your partner, your friend, your parent, your child, or someone else in your life.

What did you argue about, and why did you spend your energy arguing or fighting?

### **Reasons for Arguing and Fighting**

Here are some of the reasons you might argue and fight in conflict situations:

- You believe that you can get the other person to see things your way - that if you say the right thing, be very convincing, be very logical and rational, be right, be parental, talk very loudly, yell, threaten, blame, attack, call names, or even hit - you can have control over getting the other person to think and feel the way you want. You believe that not only can you win, but that you can somehow have control over the other's thoughts and feelings.

The problem is that, while you might be able to get control over another's behavior, you cannot control their thought and feelings. No matter how right you are, another thoughts and feelings are not yours to control.

- Dumping anger on another person may be a way of not dealing with your own feelings. Perhaps you are projecting your own self-abandonment onto the other person, i.e. you are not listening to or hearing yourself so you attack the other person for not listening to you or hearing you. Or you are judging yourself so you attack the other person for judging you. If you are judging yourself or not listening to yourself and not taking responsibility for your own feelings, then you may be blaming the other person for the guilt, shame and aloneness you feel within.
- Perhaps you are terrified that if you are open with the other person, especially your partner, that your partner will see things about you that he or she doesn't like. You might be

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using fighting as a way to avoid true intimacy, while at the same time creating a connection through the fighting. The connection you feel through fighting might feel safer than creating true intimacy.

- Perhaps you are afraid that if you get really close to someone, you will lose yourself or be taken advantage of. If this is the case, fighting might be a way to feel safe from engulfment. Once again, you can feel some connection through the fighting without actually having to feel close enough to lose yourself to the other person.
- Perhaps arguing and fighting is the only way you know to assuage your fears of rejection. Fighting might give you a sense of control over not losing the other person.
- Perhaps you feel frustrated and helpless in a job situation or a situation with someone else, and fighting with the person you are fighting with is a way to release the frustration and gain back a feeling of control.
- Anger and arguing can be an addictive way of avoiding your feelings of aloneness, loneliness, grief or heartache. All addictive behavior covers up painful feelings, and anger and arguing are no exceptions.

### **The Way Out of Arguing**

Until you want 100% responsibility for all of your own feelings - your feelings of anger, frustration, guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, fear, hurt, loneliness, aloneness, heartbreak, helplessness over others and outcomes, and so on - you may continue to use arguing and fighting as ways to avoid this responsibility. Until you are ready to lovingly attend to your own feelings with a deep and compassionate desire to learn about your own thoughts, beliefs and behavior that create your feelings, or are willing to take loving action for yourself in the face of another's unloving behavior, you may be stuck trying to control others into making you feel better. And until you fully accept your lack of control over others thoughts and feelings, you might continue to attempt have control through arguing and fighting.

You will find that you stop arguing and fighting when you learn to take 100% responsibility for all your own feelings through the practice of Inner Bonding.

## **Do You Have the Same Conflicts Over and Over?**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Kari and Rudy consulted with me because they kept having conflicts over the same issues over and over - primarily money, chores, and child-rearing. They were nearing the decision to separate, believing that they were incompatible.

I asked them to pick one of the issues and they picked a recent conflict regarding setting limits for their children. I asked them to discuss the issue and I immediately understood why they could not resolve their issues.

I explained to them that there are always two levels of communication:

- The issue itself, such as their conflict regarding limits for their children;
- The intent with which they were discussing the issue.

There are only two possible intents in discussing an issue with your partner:

- The intent to protect against losing yourself, losing the conflict, feeling rejected, or feeling controlled;
- The intent to learn about yourself and your partner - about the good reasons each of you has for seeing things the way you do. When in the intent to learn, you are open to resolving the conflict in a way that feels like a win-win.

The reason that Kari and Rudy could not resolve their conflicts is that both of them were in the intent to protect, and they were both using various forms of controlling behavior to protect themselves. In order to

resolve their conflicts, both of them needed to be in the intent to learn.

There was no point in even trying to resolve their conflicts if one or both of them were in the intent to protect/control. There is no way to get anywhere when your focus is on winning, being right, being in control and not being controlled, or avoiding any other pain. As long as avoiding pain is more important to you than being loving to yourself and your partner, you will be closed and protected and the conflict cannot reach a mutually satisfying resolution.

I worked with both Kari and Rudy on how each of them were protecting and controlling. Rudy tended to shut down and withdraw, becoming very quiet in an angry way, while Kari tended to get angrier and angrier the more Rudy shut down. Both of them were hurt in these interactions. Both ended up feeling unloved and disconnected from each other.

In order to open with each other, each of them needed to learn to tune into their painful feelings of loneliness, heartache, and helplessness in the face of the other's protections. Each needed to learn to be compassionate about their own feelings as well as the other's feelings. Each needed to care more about themselves and each other than about whether they were right, or not wrong. It needed to become more important to them to stay open and caring than to avoid their painful feelings with their protective, controlling behavior.

Kari and Rudy worked hard with the Inner Bonding process to learn how to take responsibility for their own feelings rather than continuing to blame and try to control each other.

Finally, in a session a few months into their work with me, they were both open at the same time. They were shocked to experience how easy it was to resolve the child-rearing issue, as well as the other issues they'd been struggling with for years. Through their openness and caring about themselves and each other, they were able to learn so much about themselves and each other that new solutions emerged for them. They were delighted!

If you are stuck in resolving conflicts, then let go of the issues and look at your intent. I assure you that when both of you are open to learning about yourselves and each other and want to support your own and your partner's highest good, you will be able to easily resolve your conflicts.

## **Fight or Flight in Relationship Conflict**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

The fight or flight response is a natural response to danger. Our bodies are created to fight or flee when danger is upon us, such as being attacked by a mountain lion. When faced with this kind of danger, the stress hormones pour into our body, causing some blood to leave our brains and organs and go into our arms and legs. This is vital to us if we are actually being attacked by a mountain lion or a mugger. The problem is that this same response occurs when we become afraid in other situations, such as conflict with a partner.

When in conflict with a partner, we need to have the full capacity of our minds to deal rationally and lovingly with the situation. Yet the moment we become afraid, some of the blood leaves our brain, we cannot think as well, and we automatically go into fight, flight or freeze. That is when partners tend to fight or withdraw, neither of which leads to conflict resolution.

Obviously, fighting, fleeing or freezing are not the best ways of dealing with conflict. Yet when fears are triggered - fears of losing the other through rejection or abandonment, or of losing yourself and being controlled by your partner - the stress response is automatically activated and you find yourself fighting or shutting down. No matter how much you tell yourself that next time you will respond differently, the moment fear is activated you automatically attack, defend, yell, blame, or shut down through compliance or withdrawal.

What can you do about this?

There are two solutions to this dilemma.

1. The moment there is tense energy between you and your partner, it is best for both of you to walk away from the conflict for at least 15 minutes. During this time, you can calm down and do an Inner Bonding process. As the stress response leaves your body, you can think better. This allows you to open to learning about your end of the conflict. Once you are clear about what you are doing that is causing the problem and what you need to do differently, you can reconnect with your partner and talk it out. Sometimes there is not even anything to talk out because the conflict was about the fight or flight rather than about a specific issue. More often than not, it is the stress response itself

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that is the issue. When you take the time to calm down, you might be able to apologize for your anger, blame, defensiveness or withdrawal, and the conflict is over.

2. The second solution is a longer-term solution. This is about doing enough inner work with Inner Bonding so that your fears of rejection, abandonment, and engulfment gradually diminish. The more you learn to value yourself rather than expect your partner to define your worth and lovability, the less fear you have of rejection. The more you learn to take loving care of your own feelings and needs, the less dependent you are upon your partner. When your fear of rejection diminishes, so does your fear of engulfment. People give themselves up and allow themselves to be controlled and consumed by their partner as a way of avoiding rejection. When rejection is no longer so frightening, you will find that your fear of being controlled diminishes.

The less fear you have, the less you will be triggered into the stress response of fight or flight. The more secure you feel within due to learning to value yourself and learning to take loving care of yourself, the less fear you will feel in the face of conflict. This is when you stop being so reactive and are able to remain open and caring in the face of conflict.

There is no point in continuing a conflict when one or both of you are coming from fear. Continuing a conflict when the fight or flight response is activated will only erode your relationship. Until you can stay openhearted in a conflict, it is best to continue to follow through on the first solution - taking a time-out until you feel openhearted.

## **Resolving Conflict the Inner Bonding Way**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

How would two people in a relationship with each other, both using Inner Bonding, ideally resolve a conflict?

Let's take an example. Megan and Ryan have been married for 8 years and have two children. Both Megan and Ryan work and they have a

nanny to help with the children. Megan recently received a promotion in her company and is now a high-powered executive with a lot of responsibility and some travel. Ryan has his own business so his time is more flexible. While he is proud of Megan, he is not happy about how much she is gone.

Megan loves her work and is thrilled about her new promotion. However, she is feeling pulled on and stressed by Ryan's demands on her time. How would they go about resolving this conflict?

First, one or the other would ask for a time to explore the conflict. They would set aside some time and each would approach the exploration with the intent to learn about themselves and each other. They would each have the intention of supporting their own highest good and the highest good of each other. They would be open, curious and eager to learn about what this conflict has to teach them.

Each of them would share their own experience and feelings. While one was talking, the other would listen with a deep desire to understand the other's feelings and point of view. Ryan would open to understanding how much this job means to Megan - how much satisfaction and joy she gets from being able to fully use her talents. Megan would open to understanding how lonely Ryan feels when she is gone so much. Then they would go deeper, exploring Megan's need for approval regarding her job and Ryan's dependency on Megan for his good feelings and his difficulty in making friends. Through the exploration process, Ryan learns that one of the reasons Megan works so much is that it is a way for her to get away from his neediness. He had never realized the degree to which Megan felt pulled on by his need for her to fill him up.

Megan admitted that not only was she using the job as a source of satisfaction, but also she was using it as an excuse to not feel so responsible for Ryan. She told Ryan that she actually didn't need to work such long hours, but that she enjoyed her work more than she enjoyed being with him. She explored her fear in being honest with Ryan - her fear that if she told him the truth, he would leave and find another woman to fill him up. She loved him and didn't want their marriage to end, but she was worried that Ryan would not step up to the plate regarding taking full responsibility for his own feelings and needs.

Even though Ryan had been practicing Inner Bonding, he had not realized the degree to which he was dependent upon Megan - the



degree to which he was abandoning himself. Instead of getting angry or retreating, Ryan decided to get some Inner Bonding facilitation regarding his dependency on Megan. He realized that Megan was right, because he recently felt himself being attracted to other women. He saw that he was using women's attention addictively because he was not giving himself the attention that he needed.

As Ryan worked with his Inner Bonding facilitator, he saw many ways in which he was not taking loving care of himself and had been expecting Megan to do it for him. As he gradually moved out of a victim place and into his personal power, Megan found him to be much more attractive. She felt herself desiring more time with Ryan, and found ways to cut down on her travel and hours at work. Megan also decided to get some Inner Bonding facilitation regarding her need for outside approval.

Conflict resolution the Inner Bonding way is not just about solving a problem. It is about using the problem to learn about and heal the deeper issues that are the underlying cause of the conflict.