

*CREATING CONNECTION THROUGH*

# CONFLICT



## • STUDY GUIDE •

Learn the difference between conflict that brings about deeper intimacy and out-of-control conflict that can destroy a relationship.

# WELCOME TO CONFLICT – A TASTE OF OXYGEN EVENT

## WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM TODAY'S SESSION:

We won't solve all of your conflict or relationship issues, but we will give you some helpful tools to use and resources to explore in the future.

Today, you will walk away with a better understanding of why conflict can be a good and necessary component of a healthy relationship, and how it can keep you sharp and bring about deeper communication. We will explore the difference between conflict that brings about deeper intimacy and out-of-control conflict that can destroy a marriage.

You will not be asked to speak about something you do not wish to talk about publicly.



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# TYPES OF CONFLICT PERSONAS

Generally, there are 4 types of personas when it comes to any relationship that is experiencing conflict. Each persona embodies a different type of dance, but the negative impact is still significant.

## **Persona #1: The Blame Game**

Each person feels they are the victim and blames their partner for the problems. The number of problems become the focus while solutions are ignored. No one wins the Blame Game.

## **Persona #2: Cat and Mouse**

One person pursues and the other withdraws. There is no consideration for the other's needs. Eventually, this persona will leave both partners feeling alone.

## **Persona #3: Tea Pot**

Both partners avoid conflict at all costs. On the surface everything is "fine". Over time, tension of unresolved issues will build, an eruption occurs, and the relationship is damaged.

## **Persona #4: Freeze Out**

One or both partners uses the silent treatment to either instigate or punish the other for a perceived offense ultimately leading to bitterness, resentment, and eventually apathy.

## **NOTES:**

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# BREAKOUT ACTIVITY



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Please rate the frequency of your emotional dependence on your partner during the following circumstances.

unhealthy or toxic emotional connection		Inconsistent emotional connection		Healthy or mostly healthy emotional connection	
1. When I feel stressed, anxious, or nervous, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
2. When I feel excited, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
3. When I feel confused or frustrated, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
4. When I feel relaxed, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
5. When I feel disappointed or discouraged, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
6. When I feel happy, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always



# BREAKOUT ACTIVITY

unhealthy or toxic emotional connection		Inconsistent emotional connection		Healthy or mostly healthy emotional connection	
7. When I feel angry, hurt, or upset, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
8. When I feel fun-loving, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
9. When I feel sad or depressed, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always
10. When I feel sensual, I go to my spouse...					
0 Never	1 Rarely	2 Every once in awhile	3 Often	4 Almost always	5 Always

Add up your scores for 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, then for 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10.

**Total for odd numbers:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Total for even numbers:** \_\_\_\_\_



Discover more . . . keys to creating connection through conflict on the OXYGEN Show podcast featuring Dr. Sue Johnson author of *Hold Me Tight* at [StrongerFamilies.com](http://StrongerFamilies.com). Sign up for a Premium Membership to enjoy the full podcast (see back cover for more details about Premium Memberships).

# BREAKOUT ACTIVITY

## DO YOU TRUST YOUR PARTNER WHEN YOU ARE **FEELING DOWN OR UPSET?**

**0-10:** No. You do not regularly seek out your spouse for comfort or connection when you feel down. You may feel unsafe approaching your spouse, or you may avoid connection because you fear intimacy. In order to create a healthy emotional connection, it is very important to reflect on why you don't seek out your spouse when you're feeling down or upset. Communicate your reasons to your spouse and discuss how you both can improve the situation.

**10-17:** Sometimes. You inconsistently seek the support of your spouse during low moments. You may receive unpredictable responses from your spouse when you reach out, which discourages you from approaching him/her when he/she is in a certain mood. Reflect on why you don't feel secure seeking support from your spouse, and then discuss what you discover.

**18-25:** Yes. You feel secure approaching your spouse when you feel sad, angry, or upset, and you trust that he or she will provide you with comfort and support. Reflect on the specific behaviors from your spouse that help you to feel safe and accepted. Thank your spouse for these behaviors!

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**Unfortunately, many couples have let the fire of conflict consume their relationship.**

**They have allowed patterns and conditions to become so incredibly volatile that “fires” – explosions, even – break out almost every time they try to communicate.**

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# BREAKOUT ACTIVITY

## DO YOU TRUST YOUR SPOUSE WHEN YOU ARE **FEELING UP?**

**0-10:** No. You do not regularly seek out your spouse to share positive moods or experiences. You may feel unwelcome sharing joyful or peaceful moments with your spouse, or you may avoid connection because you fear intimacy. While it is healthy to enjoy exciting or peaceful moments alone or with friends and family, it is not healthy to regularly avoid sharing these moments with your spouse. In order to create a healthy emotional connection, it is very important to reflect on why you don't seek out your spouse when you're feeling happy. Communicate your reasons to your spouse and discuss what you both can do to ensure that you feel safe approaching your spouse.

**10-17:** Sometimes. You inconsistently seek the support of your spouse during positive moments. You may receive unpredictable responses from your spouse when you reach out, which discourages you from approaching him/her when he/she is in a certain mood. Reflect on why you don't feel secure seeking support from your spouse, and then discuss what you discover.

**18-25:** Yes. You feel secure approaching your spouse when you feel happy, excited, or relaxed, and you trust that he/she will share or validate your positive mood or experience. Reflect on the specific behaviors from your spouse that help you feel welcome and secure. Thank your spouse for these behaviors!

# ACTION PLAN



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## WHERE DO WE GET STUCK?

Everyone gets stuck in negative patterns of conflict sometimes.

The goal of this exercise is to:

1. Identify where you get stuck in conflict.
2. Understand the negative impact of your response and your partner's response.
3. Make "course corrections" – adjustments to your words, tone, body language, etc. to keep your interactions positive.

## PART 1:

### Partner A:

"I get stuck when you \_\_\_\_\_. When I get stuck, I

(action)

feel \_\_\_\_\_.  
(feeling)

When I feel this way, I \_\_\_\_\_. How does this make  
(action)  
you feel?"

### Partner B:

"When you \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.  
(action) (feeling)

When I feel this way, I \_\_\_\_\_. How does this  
(action)  
make you feel?"

You can repeat this exercise as many times as necessary in order to see the full impact of the cycle of conflict.

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**Remember, healthy emotional connections are characterized by making sure each interaction you have with your partner concludes with you both feeling more positive about the relationship and each other than when you began.**

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## PART 2:

There are two contributing factors in this cycle of conflict above that can leave you feeling disconnected and insecure: feelings and actions. Initially, when a feeling shows up, it's not something we can control. Therefore, we are not going to focus on changing or judging the feelings. Instead, we are going to own our feelings and address the actions we take in response to those feelings.

Based on the results of Part 1, identify your feelings and negative actions in the space below. Then, explore possible alternative actions that you could take in order to stop the cycle of conflict dead in its tracks.

Owner:	Feeling:	Negative Action:	Alternative Action:
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Each round of conflict will have unique feelings and actions to investigate. Don't be afraid to work through this exercise multiple times in order to address each layer. Remember, healthy emotional connections are characterized by making sure each interaction you have with your partner concludes with you both feeling more positive about the relationship and each other than when you began. If you leave an interaction feeling negative, reflect on why, and discuss a course correction with your partner.

### NEGATIVE PATTERNS

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### ALTERNATE BEHAVIORS

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

# ACTION PLAN



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## EXTRA CREDIT:

This week, write down three things your spouse/partner does that leads to feel safe, prioritized, loved, or respected. Share them with your partner in a letter, a note left somewhere special, or in person.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



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Here are the steps of a good time-out.

## 1. RECOGNIZE:

Recognize your need for a time-out. Is your heart beating fast?  
Do you feel like you are about to say something you may regret?

## 2. REQUEST:

Call a time-out for yourself by saying something like, "I'm just too angry to talk right now; I need to take a time-out. Please give me an hour to calm down and gather my thoughts."

## 3. RELAX & REFLECT (WHAT IS BEHIND THE CONFLICT):

Relax and calm down. Take some deep breaths. Go for a walk or run or work out at the gym. Take a bath. Write in your journal. Read, pray, or watch television for a while.

## 4. REMEMBER:

Remember what's important. Try to identify what you were thinking and feeling that became so difficult to discuss. From where was the emotion coming?

- Try to spend some time considering your partner's point of view and what he or she is feeling and trying to communicate.
- Remember, the two of you are a team. The only way your relationship will win is if you work toward a solution that both individuals can feel good about.

## 5. RESUME:

Resume the conversation. Use "I" statements. Tell your partner what you were thinking or feeling and what you need from him/her (i.e., "I am feeling overwhelmed by our financial situation and need to take some time to process before talking about it").

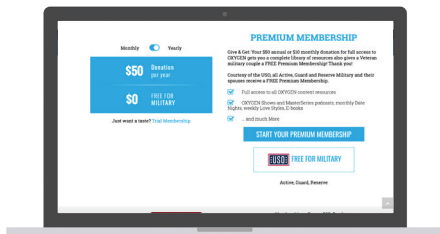
# MORE WAYS TO GET HELP FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

## GET STARTED WITH THE OXYGEN PREMIUM MEMBERSHIP

Let Stronger Families help you create a deeper, more joyful connection with a Premium Membership!

Sign up at [www.strongerfamilies.com/oxygen-membership/](http://www.strongerfamilies.com/oxygen-membership/) and start receiving important relationship tools and resources today.

- Podcasts with nationally acclaimed relationship experts
- Creative date-night ideas
- Tips for improving romance and intimacy
- Much more!



## JOIN US ON SOCIAL

Find additional resources, stories and ideas on the Stronger Families Facebook or Instagram channels. Scan the QR code or go to [www.strongerfamilies.com/social](http://www.strongerfamilies.com/social) to find the latest!



## SHARE YOUR OXYGEN EXPERIENCE

How did your OXYGEN experience go? Any tools or concepts stand out as particularly helpful? Anything we can do to improve? We'd love to hear your relationship story! Email [events@strongerfamilies.org](mailto:events@strongerfamilies.org) or fill out the post-event survey at <https://bit.ly/oxy-survey> to share your feedback.

