



**Family Therapy  
Personal and Executive Coaching  
Professional Speaking**

**Andrea Bishop  
828-687-9998**

3175 Sweeten Creek Road, Suite 3 Asheville, NC 28803

## **HANDLING CONFLICT**

### **Coaches Tip:**

Recently I spoke to a client of mine regarding an ongoing argument with her husband about when they will start a family. He has always pictured himself as a father by age 30, she always saw herself having children in her late 30's.

Their reasons and the "facts" aside, let me share with you the advice I shared with her regarding ongoing arguments. They almost always recur because one or both parties do not feel heard. This is a perfect opportunity to use active listening.

In my experience, men in particular like "rules" for engaging in conflict (hence the popularity of sports!), so create some rules of engagement up front, it'll make you both feel safer exploring the problem. If you feel things getting heated, agree to call a **Time Out**. I find the sports hand signal of T is helpful with my Hubby! We both **Stop** and take a deep breath, and have agreed to use the following steps:

1. **Sit facing and looking at each other**, preferably with the open body language of arms and legs uncrossed. Sit knee to knee.
2. **One person starts talking using "I" statements** as often as possible and presents their case. In my clients example it might be her hubby saying "I am really frustrated because I want to start trying to conceive within a year, and I feel like you are full of reasons why we shouldn't..." and so on until he feels like he has explained his case. It helps to have a symbol of whose turn it is to talk, a stuffed toy or something you can squeeze to relieve extra stress while you talk (preferably something that if thrown wont hurt anything or anyone!).
3. **When he is feeling ready** to pause for a response (about 1 paragraph of info), he hands over the toy, and she speak **ONLY WHAT SHE HEARD HIM SAY** to the best of her ability. She reflects both the content and the feelings of the message. **RESIST THE URGE TO INJECT YOUR POINT OF VIEW AT THIS POINT!** Ex. "You are feeling frustrated because you want to have a baby soon and you feel I am putting it off indefinitely...**is that correct?**" **THAT QUESTION IS KEY!** Then he gets the toy and...
4. HE responds either "Yes" or "No" or "Well, mostly, except..." and clarifies. He may also expand his idea such as "Yes! Exactly! Sometimes I don't feel like I can get a clear idea about how to help you feel comfortable with the idea...". Then he passes back the toy and she **CONTINUES TO REFLECT BACK ONLY WHAT SHE HEARS!** This may be **tough!** The tendency is to want to defend you own perspective. However, it is important that the one who goes first feels totally heard before the next person takes their turn explaining their side.

5. Once he feels heard to the point where even though she doesn't agree with him, he still feels she understands his perspective, it is her turn to fully explain her point of view. Ex. "I really feel pressured by your desire to have a baby soon, I want to feel established financially and in my career before I have a baby. I am scared the extra responsibilities will swallow my energy and take away from the rest of my life! I am also interested in us being just a couple a for a while before we bring a baby into the mix..."
6. Then when she has completely said her piece, she passes the toy and he reflects back as above, only the information he heard her say until she feels heard fully.
7. Once they both agree that they feel there points have been heard, they can start a Brainstorm on paper of all kinds of **POSSIBLE** solutions, even the ones that seem silly or unreasonable. Ex. "We could just not have a baby at all, we could have one now, or in 10 years, we could split the difference, we could set a clear financial goal to reach and then have a baby, we could have one in 2 years no matter what..." Once they are on paper, it is easier to step back and see which one feels right to try first. In my friend's case, they agreed to start investment and savings accounts in order to help her feel more financially secure, and will review their finances in 6 months. She also decided to go talk to a therapist about her personal anxieties about her "time and her body belonging to a baby". They also attended a couple's retreat that allowed them to talk more freely about their relationship and where they wanted to improve it.

This technique also works quite well in work and friendship conflicts if both parties agree to the rules. It takes practice, but really works well when you get the hang of it!

*Feel free to contact me* if you'd like clarification on the use of this tool, or if you want my help facilitating this process. **REMEMBER**, *coaching works!!* Also, please let me know if you have any ideas for future Tips topics, your input is valuable!

**Hope you find this thought helpful, and please share it with a friend!**

**To schedule a complementary coaching consultation** contact Andrea at (828) 687-0491 or [Andrea@successcoachinginstitute.com](mailto:Andrea@successcoachinginstitute.com)