

PANEL PRESENTATION

“Marital Conflict from Dating to Divorce”

Briefly introduce Bill Eddy and Todd Creager who are both going to speaking later today, but I have asked them to participate in this opening panel discussion Their bios are included in your programs.

Individual introductions by panel participants themselves:

*Focusing on how conflict resolution forms large part of practice.
Why interested in summit.*

Between the 3 of us we have nearly 100 years of professional experience dealing with interpersonal conflict.

In discussion with Todd and Bill I think we have all agreed that the following are among the reasons that many of us today are not adept at avoiding, managing and resolving interpersonal conflict:

- 1) Most of us are not taught conflict resolution skills in our homes, are schools or our relationships. Many of us were raised in high conflict marriages, by high conflict parents who had miserable marriages. This leaves the children ill equipped with the skills for assuring their own healthy marital relationships.
- 2) Many of us will learn conflict resolution skills through are participation in our religious organizations and practices, but church attendance and participation in religion is at an all time low.
- 3) Our educational institutions provide little help. We are not taught cooperative problem solving processes in our high school curriculums or at the college level.
- 4) Our media and cultural messages tend to romanticize the outset of dating (love at first site) and marital relationships (marriage is best day of your life, happily ever after, etc.) We have rose colored glasses at the beginning of relationships and marriage. We are bombarded in the media by examples of bad marriages, horrible divorces, domestic violence. We watch TV and attend movies that illustrate the bad, but rarely do we see examples of good conflict resolution skills.

- 5) Often there is a stigma around seeking help with parenting skills and relationship problems.
- 6) When it comes to divorce, systemic changes are needed our courts our dysfunctional, divorce has become big business

We have entitled this presentation *Marital Conflict from Dating to Divorce* and we are going to be discussing a chronology of sorts, we will look at following:

- A. Sowing the seeds of Marital Conflict
- B. Marital Conflict in Action
- C. Reaping The Results of Marital Conflict – the breakup, divorce

Not surprising that conflict causes relationship problems. Let's look at good example of how it can all go wrong

Look at clip from the Break Up

Video 1 *Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn – The Break up Kitchen Scene*

Panel discussion

A. Sewing the Seeds of Marital Conflict

We can set the stage for marital conflict by how we select our marital partners.

Video clip 2

Video from the Big Bang Theory, Bernadette Meets Howard

Now they married in a later episode, based on their meeting did they have a good start toward marital bliss?

Need more objective criteria for selecting our mates other than we both had mother's who drove us crazy.

Potential Partner Selection problems: We get no training on how to select a mate, trouble is inevitable.

Commonality can actually fuel conflict, etc.

Bill's handout – Dating Radar

Dating is artificial, phony experience.

Sometimes we don't choose well, we just fall in love.

But our hearts can get it dead wrong, feelings are best way to chose partner

Video clip 3

Elderly couples being interviewed.

Unrealistic expectations can lead to disappointment and conflict

Rose colored glasses syndrome – romantic notions

Elderly couple videos depict successful marriages but all we are told is that they “met cute.” Suggest that all we need to do is meet by coincidence or circumstance, love at first sight, etc. and we can have long term marital success. No evidence of what it took to stay together all those years.

In our culture, we are told to follow our heart.

Songs focus on love being the most important thing,

The BeeGees: How deep is your love?

Whitney Houston: How will I know if he really loves me?

Our culture values spontaneity. It is considered uncool to plan.

Popular song lyrics feed the romantic notions and spontaneity:

Peter Frampton's Baby I love your way “Don't hesitate because your love won't wait.”

Our culture tells us Love conquers all.

But it is a whole lot harder to stay in love than to fall in love.

When we choose the wrong people for the wrong reasons, we sow the seeds of marital conflict. Secondly, because we are not considering whether we or our mate has sufficient maturity and conflict resolution skills in the selection of our mates, and because we ourselves lack good conflict resolution skills, it's not surprising that this leads to marital unhappiness and in many cases to divorce.

B. Marital Conflict in Action

Discussion how conflict creeps into our relationships

Our communication styles – Todd’s handout

Fight talk – purpose to win, not resolve a problem, destructive communication style

Gottman’s research – 4 horseman, 5 to 1 ratio -Terri’s handout

Panel Comments.

Video 4

Everybody Loves Raymond – “Where’s the Paper”

In the Raymond clip what is good what isn’t working?

Unfortunately, we laugh at this conflict, and laughter probably doesn’t hurt, but can we learn from the media? Does it teach us how to problem solve better? Does it have negative impact?

Panel Comments.

Audience input.

C. Breakups and Divorce

When marital conflict leads to break up and divorce

Let’s see what happens to Brook and Gary – how fighting about lemons, the ballet and flowers leads to selling the jointly owned home and the Break Up

Video 5 – *Brook and Gary attempting to mediate after they have decided to Break Up*

Video 6 – successful couple

Tom and Darcy Lawson 35 years

Depicts recognition that marriage is work, takes some tools. The Lawson’s comment on marriage today: “Marriage is treated as throw away, no commitment, throwing in the towel, couples jump into it, etc.”

This video is not readily accessible in our media. It is not from a popular movie or sitcom. But it is certainly a more realistic depiction of what we can expect from marriage, it takes work to be successful.

Panel Discussion

D. Summing Up – Solutions - Briefly

Panel Discussion

Remedies: Skill building, Societal, cultural, systems, outreach and education

Our individual program presentations today will address how we can develop better skills for addressing interpersonal conflict in our relationships, families and through the divorce process.