



PC · COMPLEX HUMAN REALITIES

Conflict Coaching

We have looked at some basic principles of peacemaking, based on the book *Resolving Everyday Conflict* by Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson, in our last module. Now we'll address how you can put these ideas into practice while supporting and walking beside a person experiencing conflict. This process is called "conflict coaching."

CONFLICT COACHING

In your role as a minister, you encounter many occasions where a member is in the midst of conflict and is in need of spiritual guidance in the peacemaking process. Sometimes the member might bring up the situation during a casual conversation over a cup of coffee, and at other times someone may directly ask you for help in resolving an issue. These situations open the door for you to assist your members in living out Romans 12:18 (NIV) – *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*

Once you have decided that this is a situation where conflict coaching is appropriate, you'll want to choose a meeting environment (in-person is usually best but over the phone can also work) and time that's appropriate. Before you begin, it may be helpful to have a structure to your session. Here's an example of a framework that can be used:

1. Greet each other and begin in prayer. At this time, it would be good to clear up any questions regarding confidentiality and your role.
2. A good question to start with is "How can I help you?" to see if indeed you are able to help. At this point you should gather any basic details that you aren't already aware of such as:
 - a. Who is all involved in the conflict?
 - b. How are the people involved related?
 - c. When did the conflict start?
3. In the next step, you are collecting details about the "story". You are seeking to understand the basic issues and what has already been done. Sometimes you might need to prompt the member by saying, "Tell me more about that," or something similar.

Here are some of the skills that you should use in this conversation:

- a. Don't interrupt- Allow the person to fully tell their story.
 - b. Concentrate - Focus on what the person is saying through words and body language.
 - c. Clarify - It is helpful to ask questions.
 - d. Restate - Use your own words to recap and then ask if you have understood them correctly and if there is anything that you are missing.
4. Next, ask clarifying questions in order to gain more information. Since you are only hearing one side of the story, the skillful questions that you ask will help to fill in the gaps. They will also help you and the member understand any wrongdoing on their part.

Examples of clarifying questions and open-ended prompts:

- I think I heard you say ___. Would you tell me more about that?
 - What happened next?
 - What were you thinking about when you ...?
 - What's your goal with these behaviors?
 - I'm curious about ___.
 - I'm curious about why you ___.
 - Tell me more about...
 - What else should I know?
5. Explore the question "Where is God in this conflict?" together with the member. Guide them toward gospel truths. Help them to identify what would please God and what would give hope in the situation. *See Module PC 3.4: Conflict Resolution – The 4 G's of peacemaking – G1: Go Higher (Glorify God)*
6. As you and the member are discussing and contemplating what has happened, an opportunity may arise to ask, "Do you think that your thoughts and actions may have added to this conflict?" Or, "What do you think you may have done wrong?" is a good question to ask to spur the member to look introspectively and see how they may have contributed to the conflict. One might also need to take some time of self-reflection to understand how they are contributing to the situation. *See Module PC3.4: Conflict Resolution – The 4 G's of peacemaking – G2: Get Real (Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye)*

These questions help determine idols (ex: fears, cravings, judgements) of the heart:

- "What do you want to avoid?"
- "What do you want to preserve?"
- "What do you find yourself thinking about much of the time?"
- "Where are you putting your trust?"

- “Is there something you desire so much that you are willing to disappoint or hurt others in order to have it?”
7. Identify next steps together based on the answers to the question, “What do you think God calls you to do in this situation?” *Refer to Module PC3.4: Conflict Resolution – The 4 G’s of peacemaking as needed.* Here are some examples of possible next steps:
- a. Circle back to key questions:
 - i. “How can I please and honor God in this situation?”
 - ii. “How can I show Jesus’ work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?”
 - iii. “How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?”
 - iv. “How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?”
 - b. If the member has identified wrongdoing on their part, discuss *The 7 A’s of a Good Confession* from Module PC 3.4.
 - c. Prepare for discussion(s) with others. When planning these connections, encourage the member to:
 - i. Continue to pray.
 - ii. Plan what they want to say.
 - iii. Treat the other person the way they would want to be treated.
 - iv. Be a good listener.
 - d. Help them identify when they may need more assistance from expert sources.
8. Set up the next meeting, review your conclusions and the member’s next action steps, and conclude in prayer.

With conflict coaching, you are working with one side or group to assist in conflict resolution. You may find that you feel comfortable working on the above steps with each side separately to facilitate peacemaking. Another peacemaking approach is mediation. In mediation, the mediator is meeting with both parties involved to discuss the conflict together. Mediation can be an extremely complex situation and it is recommended that only those with advanced training in this area attempt it.

RED FLAGS: The above framework is for relatively straightforward conflict resolution. You may encounter other situations that require more advanced training. Here's a list of examples where consultation with specialists or authorities is necessary:

1. Someone is threatening to hurt themselves or to hurt others.
 - a. Call proper authorities: 911, Crisis Services, Police
2. There is physical abuse (child abuse, elder abuse, spousal abuse, etc.).
3. One of the parties is abusing drugs (illegal or prescription) or alcohol which could impede their ability to fully partake in the reconciliation process.
4. Mental illness is suspected.
5. Marriage conflict usually requires someone with special training and expertise.

You might wonder if peacemaking is different from counseling. Certainly counsel is given during the peacemaking process by helping the person(s) you are working with to apply the gospel to the situation, but peacemaking is NOT a substitute for professional counselling. You may find that one outcome of your peacemaking sessions with a member is the discovery that professional counselling is needed.

The special training of experts, such as counselors and other mental health professionals, is needed to recognize emotional and mental illness and provide expert assistance. Peacemaking is typically a short-term process, however, professional counselling is more appropriate when long-term interventions are needed.

A member might come to you with the expectation that this meeting is going to quickly fix the problem but it's important for both you and the member to realize that you are there to facilitate their discovery of the way forward according to the gospel. It's also important to realize that only God can change hearts. Sometimes we may not get the results that we were hoping for and you should encourage the member to continue to show love to the one with whom there is offense.