

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE SECRET TO RELATIONSHIPS

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As the pile of negative thoughts...

about another's behavior grows larger, it obscures the caring view we once had. Relationships prosper when we forget about the pile, and deal with what is happening now. Let the former injustices be 'water over the dam'. Deal with the 'current' stuff.

Communicate as if... you were playing tennis. As in tennis, the players follow rules and get better with practice. Let's assume Mary is upset with something John has done. In the ideal world, John would have sensed his behavior was upsetting to Mary, and he would say how his behavior would improve. However, it is Mary's responsibility to serve a ball into John's court whenever Mary has a negative feeling toward John. If Mary doesn't serve, more stuff is added to the pile that separates Mary from John. Mary appropriately serves to John with a brief 'feeling statement', such as "I feel _____, when you _____." Mary can never be wrong in how she feels; however, her thoughts about John's behavior could have been based on inaccurate data, which causes a feeling that is more intense than indicated. There are 3 ways in which John could respond to Mary's 'feeling statement serve'. If he says nothing, or if he angrily tries to serve to Mary, he loses points. A good return by John would be a brief statement indicating he understands Mary's feelings and what he will

do to stop or lessen that behavior in the future. If Mary needs data to help her think more accurately about his behavior, John could carefully add that evidence with his return of the serve. If John's return is adequate, Mary says "OK", and this game is over. If John's return is not adequate, Mary volleys back to John's court with some guidance on how John can make a good final return.

Referees and line judges often aren't available to call fouls, so each player must observe for infractions. Ensure that another ball (issue) isn't served until the original one has run its course. This means, don't bring up another issue until the original one is completed. This is the most common infraction. As soon as the original game is over, either player may fire off a serve, starting a new game. Other common fouls include 'mind reading', 'labeling', and inaccurately 'crystal balling' the future. Use **Cognitive Restructuring** to avoid these. If a player becomes overheated, he or she may call "time-out", but they must designate the time play will resume. Extended time-outs cause muscle cramping.

By following these Conflict Resolution rules, both parties win, and any relationship can be healthy.



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