**ARE you?**

Conflict resolution skills are one of the profound needs in any relationships, at both personal and professional levels. Over two decades as a Psychotherapist/Counsellor, I have observed that conflict resolution is at the top of the list that people bring in when they come to relationship/marriage counselling. However, the big question is “**Why does conflict resolution skill sometimes not work for some couples?**”

Of course, we all know that there are many contributing factors to a relationship breakdown and we cannot single out one issue as the main issue, e.g. the lack of conflict resolution skills. However, in some cases, although the couple may know how to apply conflict resolution, they fail in resolving their issues and worse still, increase the tension during their attempt to do so.

**WHY MIGHT CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS NOT WORK?**

Some of the common issues in conflict resolution failing in a relationship/marriage include (but are not limited to):

1. **Communication problem** – often we may talk, but not necessarily communicate. Talking is just giving information without any expectation of response. While communicating carries some expectation of a response from the other person, which means a two-way street of relating.
2. **Lack of active listening** – there is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing, like talking, is receiving information and does not necessarily require a response. While listening is more than just receiving information, it is also processing it and responding to the communicator. When you face conflict, and your partner is communicating to you, often you will catch yourself thinking of how to prepare to defend yourself with explanations rather than concentrating on what your partner is saying. Therefore, often you misinterpret or only listen to part of it, and therefore often you tend to react than respond, which increases the tension rather than resolving it.
3. **Emotional disconnect** – when conflict happens, some can be too emotional in the process of resolving it, and that can make their partner disconnect emotionally. There is a huge difference between ‘emoting’ and ‘communicating emotion’. ‘Emoting’ is when you cannot contain your emotions and therefore explode or blow up. While “communicating emotion” is expressing your feelings as a result of an issue between you and your partner. On the other hand, others might be too analytical and focus only on what the issue is and what the cause of the issue is. They try to argue to keep their stance, and emotions are shut down, forgetting that sometimes the impact on each other causes more hurt than the actual content of the issue.

**“ARE** **you?” will help you to resolve conflict successfully**

When you are not successful in resolving your conflict, it is worth for you to check whether you “**ARE**.”

**ARE** stands for:\*\*

**A** – accessible

**R** – responsive

**E** – engaged

**A – accessible**

One of the main core issues of conflict resolution failing to work is not being accessible, i.e. not opening your heart to the other person in the first place when they express their hurt, pain or anger. If you put your walls up or shut down, you won’t be accessible to the other person, and you will end up just ‘hearing’ rather than ‘listening’. This often leads to focusing on how you can defend yourself by gathering other evidence from the past. Being accessible means putting your own agenda aside, letting go of your defense, and being present and interested in the other person’s concern.

**R – responsive**

When you are not accessible, you naturally won’t be able to respond emotionally to the other person’s concern. As you concentrate on the what and why of the conflict, which I call the ‘content’ of the issue, you end up disregarding **the impact** of analysing the content back and forth on each other, which is **the ‘process’** between two people. You can be responsive emotionally only if you are accessible to and actively listening to the other person.

**E – engaged**

If you do not respond to the other person, then you are naturally not engaged in your relationship with the other person. This can add to your existing conflict.

So when you can’t get anywhere when you try to resolve a conflict, ask yourself whether "**ARE** you?"

If you have any questions or struggles in putting this into practice, you are welcome to write in this column and we will attend to it ASAP.

*\*\*“****ARE****” you? is adapted from EFT (Emotional Focus Therapy) by Dr Susan Johnson.*