

## Problem Solving for Couples with Opposing Views

The Problem Solving for Couples with Opposing Views exercise is designed to help you and your partner calmly and respectfully agree on a plan of action or a decision when initially there are opposing points of view.

When you and your partner discuss how to solve a problem or make an important decision, you need to stay calm.

If either of you become angry, you need to stop talking and try again later to learn this skill.

If your partner wants to stop because either of you is becoming angry, don't pursue, complain, or ridicule his or her decision to stop talking. Your situation will only worsen if you proceed when one or both of you are angry or very emotional.

If you are learning this relationship skill, but arguing occurs often in your relationship, you should stop and first master anger management and more basic communication skills. After you have done this, you can then return to this relationship skill and practice it some more.

Although this is a generalization, for many couples it is true, women have more aptitude for speaking than men. From a practical point of view, this means you should not spend more than 20 or 30 minutes to solve the problem. If you continue past a man's limits, he may become irritable and / or angry. If 'the problem' is not solved in the allotted time, agree to continue another day.

### 1. Problem / Situation discussion

Define and discuss the problem. For this phase don't make any decisions — just share thoughts and feelings using the skills learned in the Effective Communication exercise.

- Take turns speaking until each feels he or she has clearly explained their position.
- Ask questions until you fully understand your partner's position.

### 2. Summarize your partner's point of view

Take a few moments to summarize how you understand your partner's opinion on the topic and what he or she wants to happen as a result of the conversation.

**If you or your partner are not able to summarize each other's points of view, go back to step #1 and do it over. DO NOT GO ON TO STEP #3 UNLESS YOU EACH UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR PARTNER FEELS, THINKS, AND WANTS.**



## Problem Solving for Couples with Opposing Views

### 3. Problem Solution

In this phase, you try to agree on a plan to 'solve' the problem.

- Stay on topic. Only discuss the specific issue at hand.
- Agree to disagree, if necessary, but look for a practical solution that is acceptable to both of you and can work.

**TRY TO FIND A SOLUTION THAT INCLUDES AT LEAST SOME OF WHAT YOUR PARTNER WANTS. If you agree on a solution, you can STOP HERE.**

**If an agreement does not come quickly, then continue using the following communication tools to try to work through your disagreement.**

### 4. Brainstorming

Find an acceptable solution you can both agree with.

- Take turns putting forth proposals.
- Be creative. Think out of the box.
- Don't judge your partner's ideas or solutions, just listen to what your partner has to say and after he or she has finished explaining their ideas, consider if you can accept their proposal. If not, make another proposal or ask if your partner can modify his or her proposal so it would be more agreeable to you.

### 5. Compromise

If you are finding it difficult to agree on a solution or decision that is mutually comfortable, when possible you and your partner should each sacrifice a little of what you want so you can agree on something acceptable to both of you.

- Be flexible.
- Look for a win-win solution.
- It is to your credit to give in to your partner as much as you can. Many problems can be solved if you both take this position. Being kind to your partner is necessary for a good marriage and giving him or her what he or she wants is a wonderful gift of love.
- Once you agree on a 'solution,' if needed or appropriate, you may want to set a time for follow-up. Sometimes trying a solution for a short time to see if it works, also allows you to temporarily move forward while the two of you consider more options. It is recommended to revisit the topic in a few weeks or at another mutually agreed upon future date to see how the solution is working or if either of you has thought of a new plan or modification.

## Problem Solving for Couples with Opposing Views

### 6. Follow-up

Start **step #1** and try to find a more lasting solution if applicable.

- Be honest. Discuss the progress of the previously agreed-upon plan.
- Stay calm if it didn't work out the way you expected or wanted — try to renegotiate.

If you do all of this peacefully and respectfully, then even if you don't get everything you want, this type of problem-solving in your relationship can still bring you closer as a couple. Think of it as an act of intimacy.