* Look for several solutions. Look outside the lines and see if the two of you can think of multiple ways of solving the problem. Be creative.
* Keep a sense of humor. Nurture your creativity by using your humor.

**What if we can’t get anywhere?**

Sometimes problems cannot be solved on the first attempt. Perhaps emotions are too intense or the circumstances appear too complex for an easy resolution. It is important to remember that it may take time to think through the issues. Try the following ideas when you feel stuck:

* Either or both parties can call for a "time-out". This is a rest period that allows for each person to have some physical and emotional space. It is important to establish a time to come back together. Failure to schedule this re-joining time may otherwise appear to be a slight or disrespectful to one’s partner. Remember, it only takes one person to call a time out.
* Experiment with some exercises to gain insight into your partner’s perspective. For instance, trade places and attempt to advocate from the position of the other person. Or as a couple engage in a free association game in an effort to think of as many solutions to the problem as possible.
* Examine your own motives for the conflict. Are there attitudes or beliefs that may be temporarily suspended to better understand the other’s perspective?
* Consider using a consultant. If you become stuck and find it difficult to generate new ideas, check out our web site virtual pamphlet collection.

**Check out our web site**

virtual pamphlet collection at:  
www.uwec.edu/counsel

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE**

At:  
Old Library 2122  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

**Counseling Services**

Phone: (715) 836-5521  
Division of Student Affairs

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Derived from a website publication (http://www.counsel.ufl/CounselNet/cnetfight.htm) developed by the University of Florida Counseling Center (1999).
Conflict
What is it and How do I do this

Even the healthiest relationships at times experience conflict. That is to say, persons who care about one another often find it necessary to make important decisions. In that process, the couple may find that differences in perspective and opinion exist. These variances may occur around the definition of a problem, how it is to be solved, or even what is assumed to be an appropriate outcome. The important thing to remember is that people who care about each other do not always think or behave alike. But because they care about each other, the couple who cares can usually find a way to resolve the conflict in a way constructive to the relationship. Conflict, therefore, can be a means to an end, namely constructive decision-making and enhanced respect for one another’s perspectives and contributions.

When we become angry or fearful, our bodies react accordingly. We may feel some unusual and discomforting feelings. Often, the more important the issue and the closer our relation to the other person, the more intense our reactions. The body’s way of managing this stress is to initiate a fight or flight response. While of benefit in dangerous situations, these automatic reactions may not lead to effective and thoughtful decision-making. To varying degrees, we may feel ourselves become worked up (e.g., increases in heart and breathing rate, queasiness, dryness of the mouth, muscle tension, and tightness in the stomach). If voices are raised, some persons feel an upwelling of sadness or fear while others experience rising anger. These are normal responses to what our

How do we get

Several things are important to remember as the two of you attempt to reconcile differences. Remember this does not have to be a win-lose experience. Setting the problem up so someone has to be the victor usually restricts the range of solutions available, and will result in someone being cast as the loser. Stay open to the possibilities that exist when both perspectives are applied to the problem solving. Here are some suggestions:

* Make sure you understand the other person. Seek information by asking open-ended questions. These are questions that invite information to be shared. They begin with the inquiries of who, when, what, how, or where. Avoid the interrogative "why" as this invites a more defensive reply. If necessary, it is okay to stop and begin your question over to assure you are inviting information.
* Before you reply, repeat what the other person said as a way of clarifying potential areas of misunderstanding and demonstrating respect.
* As you respond, try to avoid what are called "blaming" attacks. This occurs when we use the second person pronoun 'you' and attach blame to an action. For example, "We would not have been late had 'you' not taken so long getting back here."
* Similarly, avoid using language that may be perceived as provocative or insulting to your partner.
* Keep focused on the here and now. Slipping into conflict over past issues can derail even the most caring of couples. Sometimes we do not recall the details of past conflicts, nor do we have any control over changing the past. Stay in the present.
* Take into consideration the time and place of the conflict. Perhaps where you are, physically and emotionally, merits a change in time and location before the discussion continues. It is also okay to contract for time limits on the discussion for any given session.
* If during the process of clarification you discovered a lack of the information necessary to respond, seek out the necessary resources. Try to be informative but not judgmental with your findings.
* Only one problem at a time can be solved. Avoid gunny sacking, that is the practice of unloading several problems at once. This