

Conflict Transformation for The Sake of Sanity

Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Albert Einstein

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. Matthew 5:9 (NRSV)

"I'm going to kill him if he breathes like that one more time." Unknown person sheltered in place

Conflict can appear like a multiple-armed monster engaging us in a constant game of trying to extricate ourselves from the grip of one arm while dodging the grasp of another one. So, fulfilling the call to be peacemakers in the midst of conflict in the world, in our communities and in our homes sometimes seems impossible. This may be especially true now that we are spending more time with people we love (or thought we loved before they breathed the wrong way this morning).

In our restorative justice** ministry we have found there is the need to approach conflict and peacemaking differently than what we have done in the past. Do something different to stop the insanity. On the journey to something different there are four milestones: I. Naming concepts; II. Understanding the importance of perspective; III. Identifying the Response to Conflict; IV. Making the peacemaking effort.

I. Naming the Concepts

Many of us come from cultural traditions which recognize that being able to put a name to something is crucial. A name provides understanding. And understanding provides the power to shape or transform the "something." Using the wrong name for what is going on will keep us repeating the same insanity producing actions. Sooooooo here are some concepts to remember while transforming conflict.

Peacekeeper vs. Peacemaker

- Peacekeeper – keeps the lid on conflict by any means necessary (Imagine putting a lid on a boiling pot!)
- Peacemaker – seeks truth and reconciliation by looking for the heart of the issue and clearing the way for working through conflict together. Peacemakers build relationships that allow healthy responses to future conflict.

Conflict

- Conflict is not inherently unhealthy. It can be a change agent that moves people forward. It can be a sign post pointing to issues that need to be addressed.
- Defined: Competing interests caused by a diversity of perspectives.

II. The Importance of Perspective

Any insurance claims adjuster or personal injury attorney can tell you that if six people see the same accident they will give you six different versions of how the accident happened. The same is true about any conflictual situation – everyone involved has a different perspective. The only way to transform conflict is to take the time to understand each person's perspective. (Or you can just slam the lid on the boiling pot and wait for the explosion.....)

Family fun (while shut in we might as well.....):

1. Watch the video Monkey Business and discuss it.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY
2. Name all of the different characteristics that make each person in the room unique (age, sex, hobbies, morning person or night person, profession, city person or suburbanite, etc.). Note that each unique characteristic gives that person a different perspective of a situation. E.g. I am Black, Female, a minister and an attorney who mostly grew up in southern states. So I bring five different perspectives – at least- to just one situation!
3. Daniel J. Simons reminds us in further comments on the Monkey Business Illusion that we tend to only see what we focus on. At the same time we ASSUME that everyone else is sharing our same perspective. Discuss how such an assumption affects conflict?
4. Discuss each person's vision for how different family member's perspectives can be heard. Discuss and agree upon Family guidelines for how that can happen.
5. Remember that truly listening to a person's perspective does not mean you have to agree with it.

III. Recognize the Responses to Conflict

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| Flight | Run! |
| Freeze | I can't move or say anything! |
| Attack | Protect myself and my perspective before I lose ground! |
| Restoration | Engage in brave actions to identify perspectives and address them for a just result. |

Flight, Freeze and Attack are natural, instinctual responses to conflict. These responses do not transform conflict (though in some instances they may be necessary). Reconciliation is a practiced, learned response that we are called to use as peacemakers. If we recognize a flight, freeze or attack response in ourselves or someone else, we should work to bring about a restorative response.

IV. Making the Peacemaking Effort (The Restorative Response)

Use Scriptural Guidance

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| Seek God First | James 1:5: Ask for wisdom. Luke 12:31: Seek God's Kingdom first. |
| Remember God loves you (AND them) | Romans 8:38-39: Nothing can separate you (or "them") from God's love in Christ |
| Resist the REAL enemy | John 10:10: Don't let the enemy destroy relationships/God's work. Ephesians 6:10-18 Put on all of God's armor against the real enemy. |
| Examine yourself | Psalm 51: Confess to God and ask for cleansing. |

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| | Psalm 139: Ask God to show you to yourself. |
| Guard your own response | Ephesians 4:25-5:2: Avoid evil talk (including gossip!), anger, bitterness Philippians 4:2-9: Fix your thoughts on the things of God James 3:1-12: Tame your tongue Romans 12:17-19: Don't repay evil for evil. Seek to do good. |
| Ask eternal questions | 1 Corinthians 10:31: How is God glorified in this matter? Matthew 20:25-28: Am I being the servant God requires? Matthew 6:10: Will my actions advance Kingdom concerns or mine? |
| Actively work at reconciliation (see "TIPS") | Matthew 5:23-24: Talk to each other. Matthew 18:15-17: Seek help in talking to each other. James 5:16: Confess your faults to each other. Ephesians 4:15: Grow up. Speak the truth in love. Luke 6:36 and Matthew 5:7: Be merciful, just as God is merciful to you. Matthew 5:9: Be a peacemaker (not a peace keeper) |

Practical Tips for Restoration

A. Avoid Conversational Flamethrowers

1. Beginning a sentence with "You..."
2. Using vague or generalized statements ("This always happens." or "You always....")
3. Labels/Characterizations ("You are so negative." "I find you bossy.")
4. Sarcasm
5. Poor body language (Crossed arms. No eye contact. Rolling eyes. Sistah neck roll)
6. Dismissive words/behavior ("That's just silly.")
7. Interrupting.
8. Telling everybody but the person involved that there is a problem.

B. Try Preparing Yourself To Speak

1. **Use a cooling off period. Pray. Refer to scripture. Assume innocence. Speak with Pastoral Liaison if necessary. Organize your thoughts.**

2. Use Constructive Communication

- a. **Describe:** The exact behavior or situation you find problematic.
"When x happened ... "
- b. **Acknowledge:** What you feel about the problematic behavior or situation.

"I feel. . . "

c. **Specify:** Ask clearly for a different, specified behavior or result. "What I would prefer . . . "

d. **Explain:** Give the reasons for your preference. "I believe x could be accomplished . . . "

e. **Reaffirm:** Their worth and ability to correct their behavior or work through the problem. "I have confidence in you to"

f. **Invite** and **listen** to their impression of what occurred and what is needed.

**Restorative Justice emphasizes building healthy interpersonal, community and systemic relationships which prevent or repair unjust behavior through collective efforts.

Nehemiah Trinity Rising is a long-term ministry movement working to create an avalanche of ever-increasing numbers of people with knowledge, skills and passion about the benefits of using restorative justice practices to transform communities.

Contact us if you are interested in learning Restorative Justice Practices such as family circles, conflict circles, restorative conversations and check ins to strengthen your family bond.