

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

Why We Have Conflicts and What to Do About It

By David Benzel

Fights, quarrels, arguments – whatever you want to call them – we all have them with someone from time to time. Ironically, it's usually with someone we care about, not some stranger or even an acquaintance! In other words, a family member or close friend is often the recipient of our worst behaviors during a conflict.

At the root of all conflicts is the human ego or pride. We feel offended by something someone said or did, or didn't say or didn't do. We are convinced that the other person was unjustified or thoughtless and our self-centered pride rallies to claim we've been wronged. But that's just the beginning. As we vocalize anything from dismay to disappointment to outrage, the other person's pride/ego flares up and claims, "I didn't do anything wrong here!" "I don't deserve to be treated like a villain." This is the typical reaction because all of us want to justify our actions so we continue to think of ourselves as flawless. What follows is usually a downward spiral of blame, accusations, defensiveness, sarcasm, avoidance, and additional hurt feelings. Not to mention loss of sleep, increased resentment, and more immature conversations. It can be an emotional nightmare. In some cases, time heals the wounds, and in the worst cases a relationship is severely damaged or lost.

The problem in most conflicts is in how we treat each other during the conflict. It's so obvious: How do you treat a villain? Any way you want to!!! Because in your eyes they're a bad guy. What if we were able to see the other person as our **conflict partner** instead of an adversary or villain?

"Partner?" you ask! The problem in most conflicts is that people take adversarial positions *against* one another, making each other villains. Our worst side shows up, and we blame the other person for bringing it out of us! True conflict superstars take a different approach as quickly as possible after the initial incident that started it all. This more mature and effective approach requires each person to see the other as a partner in the conflict. The reason is obvious: How do you treat a partner? Answer: With respect, empathy for their feelings, and consideration of their position. That's what's missing in most conflicts.

Let's look closely at those three elements.

RESPECT: When we choose respect, we avoid sarcasm. We listen attentively to the words and the feelings behind those words. We don't interrupt, and we assume good intent instead of malicious intent.

EMPATHY: This means we try to put ourselves in the other person's place so as to understand the feelings they're having. We might not agree with their position but we want to acknowledge that they are entitled to feel what they feel.

CONSIDERATION: We suspend our judgment of who's right and wrong in order to learn what's really going on in the other person's logic. To do this we must ask good questions and keep an open mind about all the factors that contributed to the choices and words of our conflict partner. There's usually more to the story than we know. A need to be "right" makes this step very difficult. Park your pride.

The goal need not be to avoid all conflicts. The goal of this approach is to work with your conflict partner toward a resolution that enhances the relationship, rather than weakens it. Conflict partners end up feeling closer to each other after a conflict; not wounded but stronger. They take pride in how they worked things out. Of equal importance is the fact that they do not fear the next conflict. They're confident in their ability to solve any problem that enters their relationship. The most important message you can send during a quarrel is that preserving the relationship is of the highest importance. Give it a try!

[CLICK HERE](#) to ask David Benzel a question about this topic:

<http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com/coachdavid>

David Benzel is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](#), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"* www.growingchampionsforlife.com