



AVOIDANCE OF CONFLICT

Contrary to the commonly held notion that our culture is overly litigious, studies have shown that many injuries may go unnoticed, thus preventing people from addressing them. If an injury is perceived, but the injured party blames him or her self, they are unlikely to voice a grievance. If getting what we want is not seen as an option, or we fear that asking for what we want is selfish, or we are told that our expectations are too high, avoidance of conflict is the ultimate result.

Conflict can be paralyzing. We battle internally about whether the issues are important enough to risk a relationship or a job. We convince ourselves we are being kind in not wanting to cause pain. We don't want to be seen as the "bad guy" or troublemaker. We are often oblivious to the undertow created by unresolved conflict.

Withdrawal from conflict can mean failure to protect others who depend on us, failure to take responsibility or be accountable for our mistakes, and abdication of our human and civil rights. Seeing conflict as having the potential for creating positive change, rather than something negative, might help to overcome the instinct to avoid conflict, and instead welcome it as a constructive interaction.

Identifying creative and destructive conflict:

Destructive

- loss of safety and trust leads to intimidation and withdrawal
- reduces communication and freedom of expression
- generates powerlessness and fear
- eliminates choice
- creates isolation, alienation and secrecy
- anger escalates into physical, mental, or emotional violence toward self and/or others

Creative

- people feel engaged and competent
- each person speaks his or her truth; increases respect for differences
- fosters productivity and strength
- promotes exploration of options
- furthers respect for separateness and privacy
- anger directed at issues and injustices produces clarity

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