



Values in Conflict¹

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Self-Assessment for Sharing between Partners

A learning exercise for partners (especially marriage partners) whose maturity already includes the following characteristics: (a) Freedom and openness in communication, with each other and within the group. (b) Self-confidence and self-respect that adds up to rather secure self-esteem. (c) Respect for confidentiality and, especially, sensitivity to one's partner's feelings.

Purpose

The purpose of the exercise is to facilitate depth and clarity of interpersonal communication about issues of sensitive conflict and feelings. The exercise helps participants identify more specifically and then share more openly the feelings and thoughts about conflicts, especially conflicts within oneself that result from the competing claims among two or more desirable values.

Preparation

Each person receives 20 index cards (3" x 5"s) (More cards are to be available if needed.) Put your own name at the top of ten cards. Put your partner's name at the top of each of the other ten cards and set these aside.

Task I: Identify values (commitments or goals) that are in conflict in yourself

Using a *pair* of cards for each conflict, write on each card a value that is strongly held. The pair of cards is to represent two commitments, goals, or values that are in some degree of conflict, as for example one card might say, "Doing a good job in my professional career;" the other card might say, "Giving time to the children."

Task II: Identify values that are in conflict in your partner (as you see it.)

Use the other ten cards to represent four or five of the value conflicts you see in your partner.

Task III: Share and discuss with your partner

Begin with the conflicts each of you see in *yourselves*. Tell your partner about each of your conflicts as you understand them. Share your feelings about the conflicts and how you attempt to deal with them.

Task IV: (optional) Debriefing in total group

The debriefing should be used only if the group is thirty people or less and if the group has had previous experiences sharing non-aggressively and non-defensively. The discussion should begin with a request by the facilitator asking that the conversation be kept on *implications* and generalizations rather than on the particular conflicting issues that should be kept as "a family matter." Make sure that people participate *only* if they feel comfortable.

Suggested questions for the debriefing:

How do you feel about the ways you cope with your value conflicts?

Is it easier to accept the reality of your own value conflicts or those of your partner? Why?

¹ Ted Ward. Self Assessment for Sharing Between Partners, unpublished, 1978