

C*E*A*S*E Fighting - Again!

Over the years I have developed a five-step plan to help couples work through any problem that arises in their marriage. The five-step program is actually an expansion of the "conference table" idea created by another counselor. I first introduced this program to the readers of The MAC as a single article in the August 1996 issue. Because I needed something to give to counselees to help explain the program, I used the entire June 1999 issue to explain it in greater detail. But since then I have found it necessary to revise the five-step program even more. Thus, in this present issue we will explain "C*E*A*S*E* Fighting--Again!"

Perhaps the greatest problem in the area of communication is that people don't really listen to one another as they

argue. While a husband may be polite enough to let his wife speak, he probably isn't listening. Rather, he is formulating a stinging rebuttal that he can use whenever his wife stops talking. The same is true with the wife. She also is formulating her next response. These kinds of arguments have no benefit at all. Something must change.

This five-step method is designed to get the couple (1) to diffuse the volatility of a problem situation, (2) to truly listen to the other's concerns, and (3) to gently communicate feelings and ideas. The method should be used only as a temporary measure to help the couple learn how to better deal with problems.

Counselors, try this method yourselves. Use it so that you can better instruct your

counselees. It really can work. Here's what usually works for me. First, I explain the C*E*A*S*E model to the counselees. Next, I have them face each other and work through a problem using the five-step model. In this way I can coach them and help them to use their words correctly. Finally, I give them a copy of this newsletter so that they can read the explanation of the model and have a ready reference in case they forget what they are supposed to do. Counselors, feel free to make as many copies of this newsletter as you need. Distribute them to your counselees. Use them in a Bible class situation. But feel free to use them.

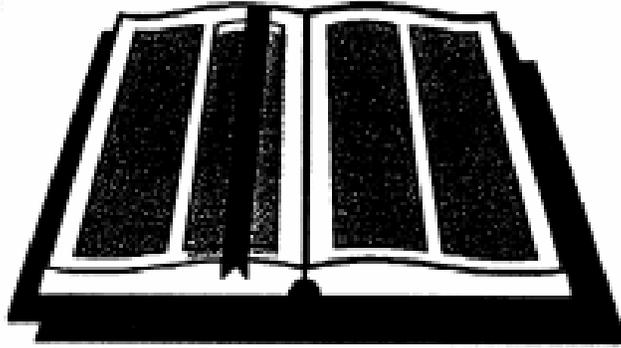
If we can get people talking nicely to one another, they can resolve any problem. I guarantee it!

What kind of words do you use?

The story of Job is extremely depressing, at least at the beginning. He writhes in physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. He believes that God has deserted him completely. And if self-inflicted

depression wasn't enough, he had three or four so-called "friends" to come and tell him exactly how evil he must be for all this bad stuff to happen to him.

As we explore the pseudo-wisdom of human dialogues between Job and his friends, we read a grotesque description of how a man's life "decays" without God. Job claimed that God "exhausted" him (16:7), which caused him to "shriveled up" (16:8). Job accused God of taking a perfect body and inflicting it with disease and decay. This is the meaning of the Greek word sapros (from the LXX), decaying or rotting flesh. What a horrible description of Job's feelings. He later describes his condition: "My bone clings to my skin and my flesh" (19:20).



When Elihu offered his young wisdom, he indicated that God often inflicts man with pain and agony. He described a sinful man like this: "His flesh wastes (sapros) away from sight, and his bones which were not seen stick out" (33:21).

Wait a minute! This newsletter is supposed to deal with communication or how to fight fair. So, why are we talking about rotting bodies and decaying bones? Because this is what happens when we use hateful words to one another. Paul commanded, "Let no unwholesome (sapros) word proceed from your mouth" (Ephesians 4:29). The Apostle knew that words used in anger are designed to destroy the hearer. Just as disease and decay enter a body and destroy it, so also angry words can search out

and destroy the heart, mind, and soul. And this is exactly what happens when couples speak to one another in anger, use hateful words, or call each other horrible names. It is an attempt to destroy the other.

What is Paul's solution? "but only such a word as is good for edification." The word for edification (oikodome) describes a builder of buildings. This is one who is careful to place each board, beam, nail, or screw in the proper place so that the building will be strong.

What kind of communicator are you? Do you look at your relationship and find ways to destroy it with words? Or, do you want to look at your relationship to find ways to make it stronger? The kind of words we use will either destroy or build relationships.

Momma was right! She said, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

Step one - Confess

The absolute first thing that must happen in any problem resolution is for the fighters to calm down, bring their words under control and speak nicely to one another. Step one is designed to do just that. In this step, both parties are required to confess what they have done to either begin the problem or add to the problem. When both are able to apologize and confess faults, the atmosphere of the discussion begins with calmness.

If this is a problem between a married couple, the husband is required to go first. He is the first one who must confess what he did wrong. The Bible indicates that the "husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23).

This does not mean that the husband is master, slave driver, or a god.

This means that he goes first, he sets the example, and he offers a model for everyone else in the family to follow.

For the sake of illustration, let's invent a problem between a married couple. Let's say that the wife ignored the husband at a party that the wife's company put on at a fancy hotel. The husband drives home in silence,

stewing over what happened. The wife asks, "What's wrong?" He answers, "Nothing!" She knows better and continues to ask. Her queries get to the point of badgering. He yells at her, "You didn't have the decency to introduce me to your friends. You always do that!" She responds, "I wasn't ignoring you. You were moping around like you hated to be there so I left you alone." The accusations continue back and forth for a while. She goes to bed as soon as she gets home, he stays up and watches TV. The next morning they leave for their work places without a word to each other. After about a week, they decide it's time to work things out.



So, step one means that the husband confesses first. "Honey, I am so sorry. I was moping at the party. I'm sorry I was silent when we got home. I'm sorry that I didn't talk that night and the next morning. I was totally wrong for what I did. Please forgive me." Notice, even though he didn't start the problem, he definitely added

to it.

Now it's the wife's turn. "Honey, I am so sorry. My questions were badgering you. I

didn't stop to consider that I might have done something wrong. I never should have gone to bed without speaking to you. And I'm sorry that I left for work without saying anything. I was totally wrong in what I did. Please forgive me." Notice, she didn't actually say that she ignored her husband. This is the problem that will be worked out later. But she did admit that she wasn't considerate of what he was saying.

What has just happened? Two adults have broken down walls that they had erected just a week before. They are both talking nicely to each other. The atmosphere is now calm. They can now do anything.

Go back and re-read their apologies. Notice that the word "you" is not found. An apology must omit this word or it isn't an apology. For example, what's wrong with this: "I'm sorry you got so upset." This is not an apology, it is an accusation. What about this: "I'm sorry if you misunderstood my motives." Again, this is just another accusation. Now this: "I'm sorry IF I have offended you." The "if" makes the statement come across like, "I'm sorry that I had a very small part in YOUR problem that evidently YOU blew way out of proportion."

There are too many ways that apologies can go awry with the word "you" included. On the other hand, apologies are almost always good when "I" is the center of focus.

Step two - Explain

The next step naturally follows the confession step. Here the couple is encouraged to offer an explanation on why they did what they did. This is not to be taken as trying to justify their actions or feelings. They just got through confessing that they were wrong in what they did. The atmosphere is now calm. It is now time for each to listen, really listen, to the other's explanation.

In this step there are basically four rules.

Rule #1, boil your feeling down to one word. "I felt ." Use a word that best describes what you felt. "I felt angry" or "I felt cornered."

Rule #2, use similes to describe the feeling. These are metaphors that are often introduced by the words "like" or "as." "I felt lost, like I was out in the middle of a jungle and couldn't find my way back to camp." What we are doing here is putting feelings into pictures so that each can imagine what the other might be going through. This is a good exercise whenever one is trying to get the other to understand feelings.

Rule #3, be creative! We want the other person to listen. When an imaginative phrase or example is used, the other must stop and think about it. How can you describe the feeling of being ignored? "I felt neglected, like I was a dog in a hot car on a summer day and couldn't get

anyone to open the door or roll down the window." How can you describe the feeling of being backed into a corner? "I felt cornered like I was Daffy Duck the time he painted himself into a corner and he couldn't get out and everything he tried made his situation worse." Be creative, because the other person must know how you were feeling when things went wrong.

Rule #4, do not use the word "you" in your explanation. Just as in Step One, there are too many ways that "you" can sound like an accusation.

Notice the difference in the following examples. "I felt miserable, like a baby with a wet diaper. I was crying but no one came to see what I needed." Or, "You made me feel like a baby with a wet diaper...." Making accusations against one another does not help the situation. So don't do it. Try to communicate your feelings in word pictures.

The procedure for this step is the same for all steps in the C*E*A*S*E model. The husband goes first. Using the problem created in the previous article, the husband now will explain WHY he moped at the

party and remained silent on the way home (things he confessed to in step one). "The other night at the party, I felt hurt, like I was a five year old boy waiting at the curb for the ice-cream truck to drive by. He drove down my street, I had my dime, I showed it to him, but he wouldn't stop to let me buy an ice-cream bar." Next, it's the wife's turn. She should explain why she ended up badgering her husband with her questions (things she confessed to in step one). "The other night,

I felt trapped, like I was a cat caught inside a small cage. I wanted to get out so I scratched the door and made a lot of noise. When no one heard me I got louder and louder. But no one came to let me out of the cage."

With the use of similes the man was able to describe his feelings of abandonment when he felt his wife ignoring him. The woman was able to describe her feelings of frustration when her husband wouldn't open up to her. Both were able to express feelings without making direct accusations against one another. And, hopefully, both were able to really listen as the other offered colorful descriptions.



Step three - Ask

Thus far both parties in the quarrel have confessed their own wrongdoing in the fight. And, they have offered to one another a simple explanation of why they reacted as they did. The couple has already accomplished what they perhaps haven't been able to do in past fights speak kindly to one another and listen to one another. With ears open and hearts tender, the couple now will offer advice to each other about HOW they should have reacted. But the advice is not to be thrown at each other. Each will ask politely for the other to offer advice.

There are a couple of rules that should be followed in this step. First, each party must truly listen to the other's advice. This step will further the couple's trek into good communication. Second, since this step will necessarily involve what may be perceived as criticism, whatever is said must be couched in polite tones and carefully chosen words. Hopefully, the tone set in the first two steps has well prepared the couple for this third step.

As in the previous steps, the husband is supposed to go first. He asks his wife, "Honey, what could I have done differently?" The wife now has the

opportunity to do two things: (1) advise her husband on how he should have reacted when the problem first arose, and (2) to present to him how he came across to her. In other words, if she says something like, "Maybe you shouldn't have gotten so mad" she is really telling him that he came across to her as angry.

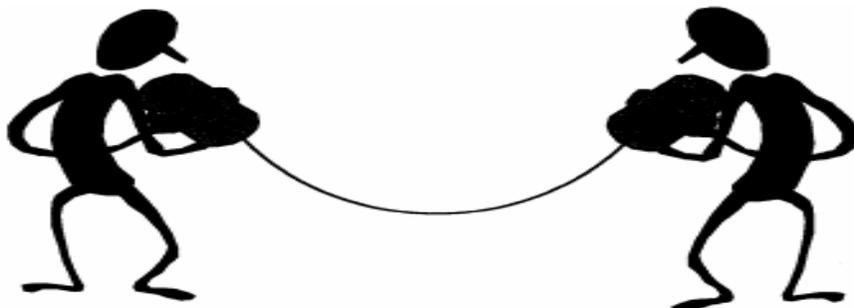
If you look back on page three, the husband was moping around at the party and refused to talk to his wife on the way home. So, the wife may say, "Honey, maybe you could have tapped me on the shoulder and asked if we could go outside and talk for a moment. Maybe if I had known that you were feeling neglected I could have changed what I was doing." Notice how the woman included the word "maybe" in her advice. By using this word she does not appear to have an absolute answer that he must abide by "or else!" It is her opinion her advice. Also notice that the woman is making a commitment to her husband with her response. She is promising that next time she will be very willing to interrupt her party, go outside, and talk through the problem pleasantly.

Now, it's the wife's turn. She asks, "Honey, what could I

have done differently?" The husband now offers his advice on what went wrong the other night. "Well, honey, maybe you could have left me alone for a little while. Sometimes, when I am upset, I just need a little time and then I can talk about what's bothering me. I don't want you to give me the silent treatment. Maybe you could say, 'Honey, I'm here for you when you are ready to talk.'"

This is the most dangerous of the five steps since it is very easy for things to go wrong here. For example, how would the wife feel if the husband said, "Next time don't be such a nag"? This is basically what he said before. But this time it came out as a criticism or a put down. Both husband and wife should go to great lengths to say things properly. We are here to repair damage not to inflict more.

UP TO THIS POINT we have not dealt with the main point of contention. Rather, we have dealt with the reactions to the problem. But now that the atmosphere has turned from anger to pleasantness, the couple should be free to dive into the original problem.



Step four - Stand up

Step four really isn't a step at all. Rather, it is a signal. The goal of the C*E*A*S*E* model is to get the couple to discuss the problem in a calm manner. When a couple can change from using words that destroy to words that build up, most of the problems go away automatically.

But what happens when it seems as though one of the parties in the fight is not fighting fairly not abiding by the rules? The prearranged signal must be in place so that one can let the other know that he/she may not be following the rules. For example, in step one, if the husband says, "Honey, I'm sorry if you were mad last night," he has not made a confession but he has found a polite way to accuse her of getting mad. Violation! When the wife notices the violation of rules, she employs the signal she stands up. She doesn't say a word.

This is to signal to the husband that, in the wife's opinion, he has violated a rule. He must immediately stop talking, consider what he just said, think of a better way to say what he wanted to say, then try it again. The husband should say something like; "I realize that I

may have said something wrong. Please sit down and let me try it again." If this happens a second time, the husband should kindly say, "I am not sure what I am doing wrong. Would you please tell me?" At this point the wife has the responsibility to tell him that he used the word "you" in his apology and it felt like an accusation.

This signal should never be used to badger or punish the other person. It is to be used out of a sincere desire to get to the root of the problem. Done properly, this device should continue to force the couple to speak kindly to one another.

It is important that one not use this signal for every little thing that seems out of line. Remember that the whole purpose of this model is to draw the couple closer.

Here are some possible situations in which the signal might be employed: one party seems to be getting angry; one party raises his/her voice; an explanation appears to be a condemnation or a criticism; an apology doesn't seem like an apology (use of word "you" instead of focusing on "I"); tone of voice is not kind; one appears to be lecturing the other.

Whenever one party feels

that the rules aren't being followed, the signal can be employed. But again, its purpose is not to punish, but rather to bring more kindness and quality communication into the problem resolution process.

So, in a nutshell, here are the rules to the fourth step:

*Agree- Both parties agree beforehand that this signal will be employed if one or the other feels that things are not going according to the rules.

*Stand up- When one feels that things are not going according to the rules, he/she will stand up.

*Stop talking- The one talking ceases immediately. The one standing remains silent.

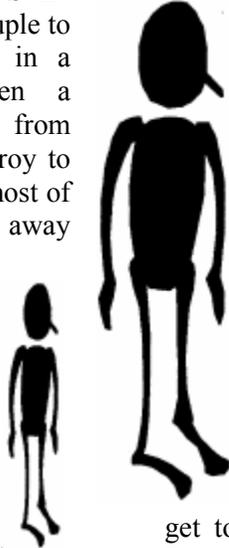
*Recognize the signal- The one talking should say something like, "I realize that I may have said something wrong. Please sit down and let me try again."

*Reconsider- The one talking reconsiders what it was that he/she said.

*Rerword- Figure out a different way of saying what needs to be said.

*Retry- Begin again.

*Request help- If this happens again, ask the other for help in understanding what is going wrong.



Step five - Erase & Enjoy

The final step in the C*E*A*S*E Model for problem resolution actually has two parts.

First, the couple must ERASE the problem from their lives. The couple must be able to go on with their lives without the fear that this "resolved" problem will haunt them or be brought up at the next fight. The Bible states, "Love does not bring into account a wrong suffered" or "Love keeps no record of wrongs (I Corinthians 13:5). True love must not bring up past problems AND true love must forget past problems.

Forgive and forget is that really possible? Well, first of all, one can always forgive. God demands it. God gave us the ability to forgive. We must forgive. But second of all, forgetting is impossible. Our minds were created with the fantastic ability to remember every piece of data that any of our senses have experienced. It is a marvelous thing that God has done. So technically, we cannot forget just like God cannot forget. Then what does it mean that God "will remember our sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12)? It means that God has made a commitment to us that He will never again bring up those forgiven sins. We start fresh!

This is what is necessary in a marriage. A couple must make a commitment to never bring up the resolved problem again. In

this fifth step, then, the couple must make a verbal commitment. "Honey, I promise that I will never bring up this resolved problem again. No matter how mad I get and no matter what goes wrong in the future, this problem will remain buried."

The second part of this final step is that the couple must ENJOY one another. In other words, they need to kiss and make up. There are some reasons why a couple must force themselves to kiss and make up here.

First, some people tend to hang on to ill feelings, even when problems are resolved, as a crutch or some kind of security blanket. Perhaps this is done out of habit. The couple should not be allowed to carry these feelings into a problem-free situation.

Second, if the couple cannot kiss and make up, then

perhaps the problem has not been resolved. It is time to sit down and talk some more.

Third, when the couple kisses and makes up, they begin to replenish the love that was drained from their marriage during the fight. The biblical directive of Ephesians 4:22ff covers this. Once old behavior is put off, new behavior must be put on.

Fourth, when the couple can kiss and make up, they can once again celebrate marriage, unity, commitment, and love. Marriage is the greatest commitment on earth that anyone can enter. And intimacy, even as little as kissing, helps put "icing on the cake." A marriage worth keeping and working on is a marriage worth celebrating.

A Final Thought

The information contained in this newsletter is designed to help any couple begin to speak kindly to one another. The more the couple practices, the more it will become a habit. Eventually, the couple will not need to sit down each time at a formal conference table or family meeting and work through these five steps. It should become natural and automatic to discuss a matter in kindness, respecting one another. But later, if tempers flare and nothing is getting done, call a family meeting and C*E*A*S*E the fighting!

