

CATHOLIC  
*Remarriage*

A WORKBOOK FOR COUPLES

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ave maria press  Notre Dame, Indiana

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[www.avemariapress.com](http://www.avemariapress.com)

International Standard Book Number: 1-59471-038-4

Cover design by Brian C. Conley

Text design by Katherine Robinson Coleman

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

# *Introduction*

Congratulations for making it this far! If you are using this workbook, you are either preparing for a second marriage (for you, your future spouse or for both of you), or you are already in a second marriage and are seeking convalidation. That means you wish to regularize your marriage in the church by renewing your marriage vows and completing the proper paperwork. If you have lived through divorce, your journey has undoubtedly been difficult. It may remain so. You have endured the failure of a first marriage, the heartache of divorce and the painful process of healing. Perhaps unexpectedly, you experienced new life by falling in love again.

People who are in your situation, seeking a second marriage or convalidation in the Catholic church need to address any leftover issues surrounding the breakup of their first marriage. This usually results in that person seeking an ecclesial declaration of nullity for their first marriage (an annulment). This can be a painful yet cathartic process. A declaration of nullity is an official declaration by the church that the conditions necessary for a permanent, sacramental bond didn't actually exist when your first marriage began. So what appeared to be a valid Christian marriage was, in fact, not. This does not undermine the reality of the relationship and the hardship its failure brought. Nor does a declaration of nullity affect the legitimacy of children. It simply means that the conditions for a permanent marriage bond (one that is sacramental) did not exist.

When a person receives an annulment, there is usually a directive to undergo some form of pastoral counseling and/or assessment before you can marry again. This directive by the diocesan marriage tribunal is given in order to preserve the sanctity of marriage and ensure that any mistakes, immaturity, or personal faults that could harm a marriage have been addressed. Thus, it is possible that the diocesan tribunal directed you to receive some form of pastoral counseling before you are free to marry again or have your existing marriage validated by the church.

For some married couples this seems like a strange and unnecessary burden since they have already been remarried for many years before seeking an annulment. Many report that they are happily married and don't completely understand why it is that they must undergo pastoral counseling.

Keep in mind that the church has your best interest in mind by asking you to do some form of assessment/counseling and preparation. The best way to view this directive is to use it as an opportunity for a “marriage refresher course.” If you take this approach, I believe you will find that your efforts are greatly rewarded.

## USING THIS BOOK

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The exercises in this workbook are aimed at helping you assess the strengths and weaknesses of your present relationship and then to address more universal issues like communication, conflict resolution, parenting children in a blended family, and the spirituality required of a mature and healthy Christian marriage.

There are a variety of ways that this workbook can be utilized. One way is that your parish priest, deacon, lay pastoral minister or pastoral counselor works with you on the sessions that are most appropriate. The two of you will complete the exercises and then talk about them with the parish staff person assisting you. Another way to use the workbooks is by getting together with a group of couples in similar situations. This again requires you to do much work as a couple and then discuss various issues with a small group. Still another approach is to have you meet with a married couple from the parish for a couple-to-couple dialog. Here the couple who works with you likely will have experienced a second marriage themselves.

Each session has a case illustration with discussion questions. I hope that these illustrations tease out and facilitate discussion between the two of you. Your priest, deacon, or lay pastoral minister-counselor will have to decide with you the extent and depth of your preparation. Obviously, each case is different and it is difficult to assign a time length to your specific preparation.

This workbook is arranged in a flexible manner. Adults learn at their own paces and will learn new skills when they are ready, not when someone tells them they are ready. There will be sections in this workbook that you may feel do not apply to you. But there probably will be other sections or even entire chapters that you or the pastoral minister assisting you feel need to be addressed. This is why the first session in the workbook is an assessment of your present relationship. Based on how you fill out the assessment, you will begin to see those areas that need to be addressed. This is not a class and you cannot flunk. It is rather a process of exploring who you are and what gifts and challenges you will bring to your new marriage. Your pastoral minister is there to assist you in this stage of your journey and wants to help you maximize your new commitment.

### *First Marriage / Second Marriage*

Some of you are preparing for or are already in a first marriage and are using this book because your partner was previously married and divorced. If you are in this situation, then your marriage preparation may have some awkward moments for you. Your spouse or spouse-to-be has been through a previous marriage and has a set of experiences that lie outside of your own. It may be that as you go through these exercises you will feel uneasy, especially in the areas that pertain to your partner's first marriage. You may feel intimidated or fear being naïve. Your partner also will likely be uncomfortable talking about some things and feel certain vulnerabilities. Just do your best to enter into the process openly, honestly, and with love. Speak with your pastoral minister if your discomfort becomes too great. Listening to an honest examination of the issues that led to the failure of your partner's previous marriage and sharing your own concerns and fears will give you a better sense of what issues both of you face as you prepare for your marriage.

### *Widows and Widowers*

Not unlike the situation discussed above, you may at times feel like you and your partner are on unequal footing because you lost a spouse through death while your partner lost one through divorce. Again, it is important to talk and work through not only your own lingering grief and uncertainties, but also the grief and uncertainties that divorce brought to your partner.

In my experience, people who are remarried want to stay that way and will do whatever they need to ensure that their relationship is healthy. Perhaps the most important aspect to the success of your new marriage will be a commitment to a specific and sustained spirituality. As a marriage therapist I have seen too often the negative consequences of a lifestyle that is isolated and does not encourage a couple to go out of themselves and become involved in their community. Quite frankly, too many of us are individualistic in our lifestyles and materialistic in our spending. A sustained and specific spirituality will encourage both of you to show up every Sunday at church and perhaps even to get involved beyond Sunday mass.

Finally, I congratulate you on approaching the church so that your marriage will be regularized. This means that you didn't allow disappointment and discouragement to keep you from this goal. This is a testimony to your own perseverance. I truly hope that this effort strengthens your commitment to each other, to your new marriage, to the church, and to making the world a better place through the witness of your married love.

ANTHONY J. GARASCIA, MS, LCSW



# *Christian Marriage: Our Context and Our Goal*

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## A SACRED COVENANT

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**M**arriage exists today as both a pastoral challenge and a great gift for the church and the world. The challenge comes from the many pressures that assault marriage in the twenty-first century and the very high divorce rates in our society. The gift comes from the many benefits that marriage provides the spouses and the wider culture: commitment and stability, the witness of love, selflessness and sacrifice, humor, creativity, and fun. In marriage we often see the best and sometimes the worst of humanity.

The church confers upon a couple beginning Christian marriage the greatest of praise and blessings. It sees in marriage the embodiment of Christ's love for his church and looks to the married couple to give voice to it through the way they create their marriage, the way they parent, and the way they reconcile when hurts intrude.

Since the close of the Second Vatican Council, the church has placed greater emphasis on marriage as covenant while also emphasizing marriage as sacrament. The first two paragraphs of the *Introduction to the Rite of Marriage* state:

1. In virtue of the sacrament of marriage, married Christians signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and his Church; they thus help each other to attain holiness in their married life, and in welcoming and rearing children, and they have their own special place and gift among the people of God.

2. A marriage is established by the marriage covenant, the irrevocable consent that the spouses freely give to and receive from each other. This unique union of a man and a woman and the good of the children impose total fidelity on each of them and the unbreakable unity of their bond.

The notion of covenant dates back to ancient Israel, before the time of King David. It was a secular term borrowed by the writers of the Jewish scriptures to describe the relationship between God and his people, Israel. In the secular meaning, a covenant was a specific relationship entered into by two unequal parties, usually states. The weaker party sought protection from the more powerful party and agreed to the terms laid out for it by its powerful ally. For its part, the more powerful party agreed to offer protection to the weaker.

Israel was in need of a protector, as it was often used as a pawn in the maneuverings of nation states like Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. The God of Israel, after giving the Ten Commandments, became Israel's protector and promised always to be faithful to the people of Israel. For its part, Israel agreed to abide by the rules of life outlined in the Ten Commandments. As the history of Israel unfolded, later prophets emphasized the mutual love borne out in the covenant between Israel and God. It was a natural development to compare God's love for his people to the love of a bridegroom for his bride. God was said to have "nuptial" love for his people.

With the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus, the image of a wedding looms large in understanding God's love for his people. Jesus' presence and actions during the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11) establish the sacramental quality of marriage. This event also expands the image of the wedding feast, promoted by the prophets, as a foretelling of the messianic banquet.

Christian marriage is an extraordinary sign of God working through and in the ordinary. Jesus blessed marriage and gave it a special status in the unfolding of God's reign. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) speaks of marriage as the "spousal love" between Christ and the church (CCC 1613-1616, 1659). Marriage as a sacrament points toward the love between Christ and the church, and offers married couples the grace to make present his love in the concrete ways. We say that sacraments are efficacious signs, meaning that they bring about what is signified. If marriage points toward the hidden reality of Christ's love for the church, then in a Christian marriage the couple mirrors that same intensity of love in their own personal way.

There is another important but less obvious point to be made about the covenant of marriage. Two married people, in taking on the responsibility to be a sign of Christ's love for the church, willingly bring about an irrevocable, or permanent, bond. This is because their very commitment points toward

the unfailing love of God, and because a sacrament brings about what it signifies. The bond entered into by husband and wife creates the same type of bond that exists between God and his people: Permanent and unwavering.

It is interesting to note that in Spanish and French the word *covenant* is translated as *alliance*. This might give us a fresh look at marriage: a man and a woman make an alliance between themselves and God to love each other and to sustain this love throughout a lifetime. An alliance is a dynamic partnership that involves planning, celebrating, respecting, praying, and creating a sacred, safe place to nurture the commitment. The notion of *alliance* might seem strange to you, but it implies a dynamic relationship where two people unite to achieve a common end. The relationship, although structured by rules and even law, goes well beyond rules and law to form a deeper reality. At this deeper level of reality the alliance involves a spiritual, even mystical, bond that unites the couple with God, in a covenanted alliance that calls everyone to a deeper maturity and holiness.

### For Reflection

1. What values do you want people to observe when they see the covenantal aspect of your marriage?

✓ *Check all that apply*

- That love conquers all
- The lived reality of forgiveness
- A model for Christian community and friendship
- Two people really in love
- That married love serves the world
- God's love for all people
- That the world can be a better place
- That we take responsibility for our family
- Those two people can be fulfilled and happy in marriage



2. When you think of the words “covenant” and “alliance,” which expresses your marital relationship more fully? Why?

### SINNERS CALLED TO HOLINESS

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How can two people, with all of their inadequacies and frailties, dare to enter into a union that claims to mirror the love that God has for his people, a love that is permanent and lasting? Can any of us guarantee fidelity like that of God to his people? We would be fools if we said that we could. In raising marriage to a sacramental level, it might seem that God is asking too much of a married couple.

The answer to this seeming contradiction is found in the original notion of a covenantal relationship. Israel was the weaker, sinful party in the covenantal relationship with God. God knew that Israel, as a nation, would flounder and wander away from him, yet he continued to renew the covenant again and again. Because it was a permanent bond, the relationship was, and is, forever. In other words, no matter what Israel did to harm the covenant, it was God who remained faithful, continually calling Israel to a deeper holiness.

The same is true for the sacrament of marriage. In a very real sense, the two people who marry are like Israel before God at Mount Sinai. Together they receive the terms of the covenant. Together they are to hold fast to the love and unity into which God has called them through marriage. Sacramental marriage is not a solitary act between two people; rather, it is a reflection of the permanent and unfailing love of Christ. The ecclesial community—which includes relatives, friends, and acquaintances—gives acceptance of, and witness to, a new social unit that is the foundation of family life within the Christian community. Not only does marriage spring from community, it creates it. The joining of two lives in the sacrament of marriage creates the domestic church.

Just as the church is comprised of sinners called to holiness, married couples are also called to face the harmful aspects of their own sinfulness and to embark on a journey of holiness. This is a journey toward wholeness. Just as God knew that Israel could fail with its part of the covenant yet remained present and faithful, we trust that God will be faithful also to two people who will falter in their permanent bond with one another and with God.

In the end, perhaps the most important thing about understanding marriage as covenant is that it speaks of an ongoing, lasting relationship

between God and the two married people. Placing emphasis on God's role in this relationship calls for a more dynamic understanding that moves beyond the legalities of civil and church laws to a relationship that relies on the living, loving God to sustain the core of their commitment.

## For Reflection

1. When you get in touch with the notion that we are sinners called to holiness, what does this mean to you?
  
2. ✓ Check the appropriate response(s).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I am incomplete and need to do better.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ I need my spouse to keep me honest.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Getting in touch with incompleteness is hard.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ We both need honesty and prayer.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Forgiveness is an important value.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Embracing vulnerability is hard but necessary.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ When we hurt each other it is important to address it.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ The sacrament of reconciliation is an important part of our married life.

### A COVENANT THAT MIRRORS THE TRIUNE NATURE OF GOD

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Because marriage is a sacrament, it naturally seeks to reflect the life of God that sustains a marital commitment. This is seen in the very nature of married love, which is a blend of love that moves both inwards between husband and wife and outward toward the world and community. The inward movement can be expressed by the Greek word *instasis*. In God, *instasis* is the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity. Married couples are called to this same kind of indwelling. In other words, they are to live profoundly rooted in the love and intimate union that they share. For a married couple, *instasis* is the mutual love of husband and wife and the circle of intimacy they create wherein they safely and freely express that love in complete self giving.

The outward movement of love is expressed through the Greek word *extasis*, which is an outpouring of creative energy and love. We experience the *extasis* of the Trinity in God's love that both created the world and sent

his son, Jesus, to re-create it. In the Trinity exist three distinct persons but one God. In marriage there exist two distinct persons with separate characteristics and personalities, uniting in God to form one identity. We speak of the two becoming one, and the reality becomes very deep and almost beyond words. If you want to see the triune God, find a couple who truly loves each other and observe them for a while. The *extasis* of married love is expressed in the ongoing generativity of their love which creates children and the family, but which also takes responsibility for extended family, neighborhood, church, and the larger world. *Extasis* is also the root of our English word "ecstasy". Consider the connection between the highest expression of sexual union and spirituality. When a man and woman unite in sexual intercourse by a free giving of self, the ecstatic process is one of an outpouring of their love for one another. This concept is explored in the book *God's Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World* by Beatrice Bruteau.

The rhythm and balance between instasis and extasis is sometimes difficult to achieve because of the many personal needs that sometimes are in tension with the needs of others. This calls a couple to practice Christian discipline, prayer, and spirituality so that they might more fully participate in the life-sustaining, dynamic love of the Trinity.

### For Reflection

1. When I consider that love is to mirror the love of the three persons of the Trinity:

\_\_\_ I am honored.

\_\_\_ I feel called to a deeper responsibility.

\_\_\_ I have to think about it.

\_\_\_ I feel called to spiritual growth.

\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you agree that there is a connection between your sexual expression and your spirituality? What do you think that connection is?

# five



## *Dealing with Conflict*

**C**onflict resolution skills are some of the most important tools that married people cite when they are asked what it takes to have a successful marriage. This session will explore how you respond to conflict and will give you some ideas about how you can resolve conflict in a constructive manner. Take some time to respond to the statements and questions in the sections that follow. They are designed to assist you in understanding your approach and your partner's approach to conflict.

### UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONFLICT STYLE

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#### *Identification of the Problem*

1. **✓ Check the statements that fit your relationship.**

My partner is usually the first one to identify a problem and bring it to my attention.

I'm usually the first to identify a problem and bring it to my partner's attention.

We both equally identify problems in our relationship.

2. **When there is conflict between us my first tendency is to:**

Avoid

Become quiet and withdrawn

Become angry

Become aggressive

Try to soothe things over

Criticize

Respond with humor

Become defensive

- Give advice                       Get cynical  
 Respond with sarcasm             Blame me or others  
 Raise my voice or yell             Try to listen  
 Try to understand my partner's feelings  
 Sigh, groan, or mutter discontent  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Describe how your own parents resolved conflict in your family. Utilize the checklist provided above.**

- a. Did your parents argue about the same things over and over again? If so, about what did they argue?
- b. What positive messages and behaviors did you learn from your parents about dealing with disagreements and conflict?
- c. What negative things about dealing with conflict did you learn from them?

**4. Assessing your Present Situation**

Place a ✓ check next to the statements that are true.

- We strive to negotiate rather than fight.  
 Our conflicts produce winners and losers.  
 We argue about the same old things.  
 We often get into power struggles.

Comments:

**5. My partner and I express anger or frustration through:**

- Name calling                       Withdrawing, shutting down  
 Yelling                               Criticism  
 Threats of violence               Sarcastic comments  
 Threats of divorce/separation  Actual violence

- \_\_\_ Building of walls                      \_\_\_ Blaming
- \_\_\_ Respectful sharing of feelings   \_\_\_ Listening to the other's position
- \_\_\_ Put downs
- \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. If you could change one thing about how you deal with conflict, what would you change?

7. If you could change one thing about how your partner deals with conflict, what would you change?

8. What one thing would you change about how the two of you deal with conflict together?

9. Do you adopt any of the following unhelpful conflict styles when you and your partner disagree?

\_\_\_ **The Cynic:** In this role you constantly make sarcastic comments about almost anything your partner says as the conflict escalates. You may even belittle him or her when he or she attempts to send a peace signal to you.

\_\_\_ **The Punishing Parent:** In this role you first scold your partner and then when she or he doesn't respond positively, you cut off your partner emotionally. You refuse to talk or consider a request to reconcile. You might choose not to engage your partner for days.

\_\_\_ **The Pouting Child:** It's hard to have a punishing parent without a pouting child. In this role you sulk for hours or even days, even when

your partner clearly admits to being wrong after the argument is finished. At the first sign of renewed conflict you retreat back into this role.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Rage Warrior/Exploder:** In this role you let your “anger be your guide” once conflict escalates. You explode, rant, and rave. People in your family may even be a bit afraid of your temper. You might truly believe that the explosive anger was justified by the perceived injustice done to you.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Interrupter:** In this role, you interrupt your partner when things escalate, stopping him or her after only a few words are spoken. Interrupting someone when conflict is escalating is a good way to ensure that conflict will continue to escalate.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Pursuer:** When conflict escalates this person hates to be ignored and will pursue his/her partner into different rooms in order to make his/her point.

\_\_\_\_\_ **The Escaper:** The escaper basically shuts down emotionally and withdraws physically when conflict escalates. She or he may stay in this mode for days and is usually sensitive to threat or is afraid of her or his own anger.

10. Do you adopt any of the following healthy conflict styles when you and your partner fight?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Problem Definer:** In this role you define the problem as specifically as you can. (You speak for yourself concerning how the problem affects you using as much as possible “I” language.) You connect events with feelings and with the impact that they had on you. You also say what you want to see happen and you indicate that you’re open to negotiation. “When such-and-such occurred I felt \_\_\_\_\_. As a result this happened. I want the problem to be solved by \_\_\_\_\_. What do you think?”

\_\_\_\_\_ **Bridge Builder:** Adopting this role means that you might say things like this to your partner when conflict escalates: “I really want to be your friend and resolve this. How can we do this?” It might also mean that you take the other’s side for a while in order to signal him or her of your positive attempt: “Let me get into your skin for awhile so I can understand the problem from your perspective.”

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling Affirmer:** In this role you concentrate on attending to your partner’s feelings so that you do not minimize the impact of the problem. This role requires you to respond first to the other’s feelings before you make your own response. Attending to another person’s

feelings requires a good deal of discipline and self-presence. This is especially true when your own feelings might be all jumbled.

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**Content Validator-Listener:** It helps when someone simply hears us out and truly listens to what the other is saying without interruption. Truly indicating that you have heard the other person relieves the situation and helps the other find an anchor in safety and calm. Saying, "Tell me what is making you so angry," and then really listening can go a long way to resolving conflict.

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**Option Generator:** This person realizes that the more options a couple has available when facing a problem, the better both partners will feel. She or he attempts to see as many options as possible once the problem is adequately defined.

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## UNDERSTANDING HOW CONFLICT ESCALATES

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Imagine that you and your partner were mountain climbers and that the two of you embark on a particularly dangerous climb that will take you over ice fields that sometimes split apart, leaving very deep crevasses. As you begin your climb, things go well and you are able to communicate about the routes to take. When it comes time to solve the problem of which trail to take, you are able to talk things through.

But as the climb gets tougher, both of you begin to get tired and a little scared. Maybe this climb is more than you bargained for. As your energy and patience run out you begin to bicker and blame each other. You emerge from your climb and begin to traverse a large ice field. Because you both are tired you get a little careless.

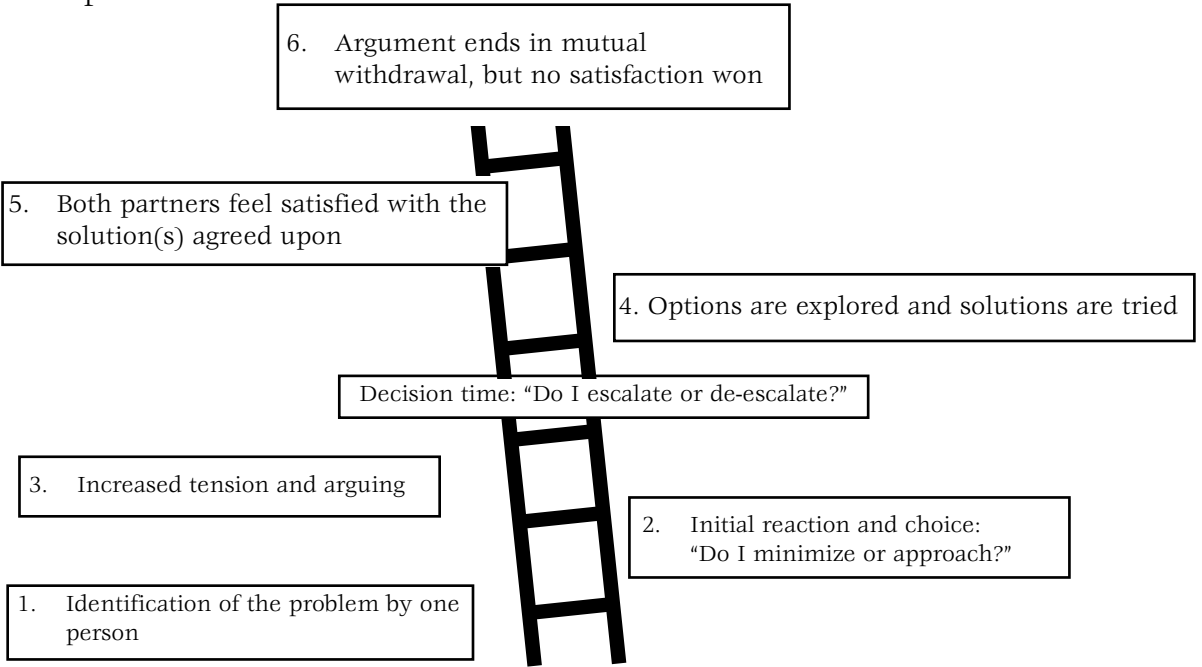
Suddenly, there is a large crack and the ice field shifts, and before you know it each of you is on opposite sides of a sixteen foot crevasse, connected to each other only by your safety ropes. Your first tendency is to shout at each other, curse a bit, and blame each other for not being careful. After you settle down a bit you begin to understand your dilemma. You are connected together through the safety ropes but neither of you can make it over to the other side. If one of you pulls the rope too hard the other could slip into the crevasse and pull the other in as well. Your choice is to wait there together but isolated, or to solve the problem together by cooperating and getting a little creative.

### *The Conflict Cycle*

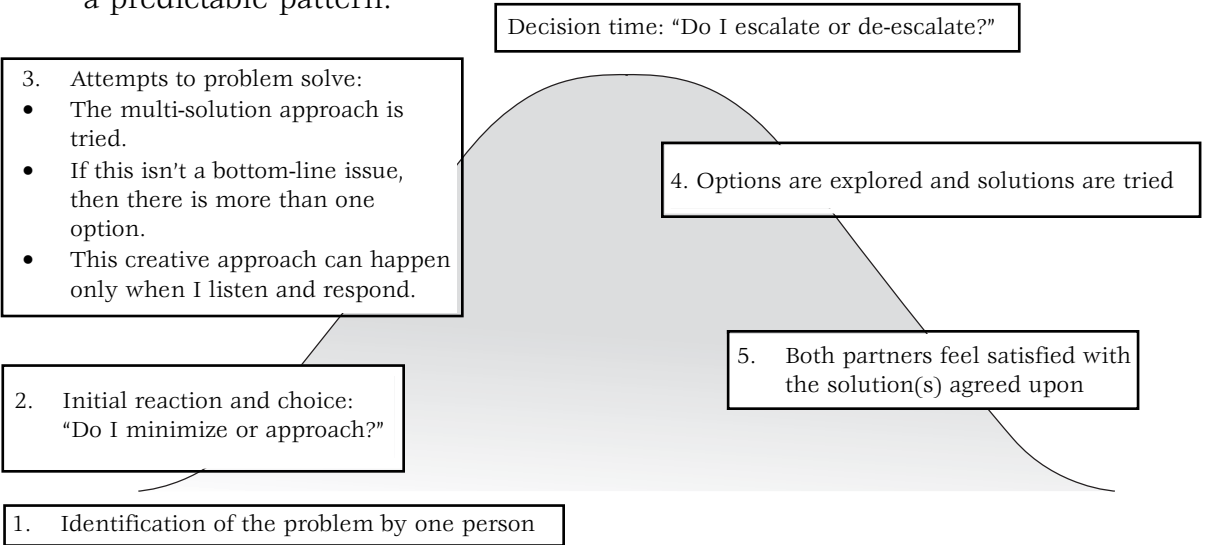
Our relationship conflicts often have a predictable pattern of escalation to them. Just as with our rock climbers above, conflict has a steep escalating curve to it.



One typical conflict pattern is escalation. It unfolds in a predictable pattern:



An alternative approach is defusing or de-escalating. This also unfolds in a predictable pattern:



As you can see by the diagram, there is a crucial decision that you face early in a conflict situation. You have to decide whether to continue to escalate your conflict or try to de-escalate it. Take some time going through the exercises that follow and identify both your response and your role in the various stages of conflict resolution.