

There are two perspectives in this example that seem at first to be in such conflict that no resolution appears to be possible. The Policy of Joint Agreement dictates that there be no contact with the choir member until the spouses

Scenario #2: Ralph feels that his wife, Sally, is being too friendly with a male choir member. Sally feels that nothing is going on, so Ralph should not be concerned. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

A possible win-win resolution for this conflict was outlined on pages 47-50.

Scenario #1: Amy believes that Sam's friends are taking up too much of his time. But he believes that having friends requires an investment of time, and friends are important in a man's life. Amy feels that Sam's wife and children should be his highest priority and that his extra time should be spent with them. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

Conflicts over Friends and Relatives

Possible Win-Win Solutions for Practice Conflicts

can enthusiastically agree to a resolution. One possibility would be for them to quit the choir and do something else that evening that would be just as enjoyable for both of them.

Sally's position that Ralph should not be concerned is disrespectful, so trying to talk him out of his concern will lead nowhere. He is concerned, and that's the main point of this conflict. But if Ralph could define more clearly what he means by Sally being "too friendly," she might be able to continue having a friendly conversation with the choir member without offending Ralph or the choir member. So Ralph suggests that Sally limit her conversation with the choir member to no more than three minutes, not touch his arm when talking to him, and make sure that Ralph is standing next to her whenever she talks with him. Since "nothing is going on," Sally enthusiastically agrees to do that because she wants Ralph to be comfortable with her behavior, and it won't prevent her from being friendly.

Scenario #3: Joan feels that Henry is helping his widowed mother with home repairs while letting their own home go unrepaired. Henry feels that his grieving mother needs immediate emotional support, which his home repairs can provide. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

The goal in this conflict is to provide emotional support for Henry's mother while also making needed repairs in Henry's home. While discussing this conflict, Henry doesn't make repairs either in his mother's home or in his own home (Policy of Joint Agreement). Henry suggests that he invite his mother over to visit while he is making repairs to his home. Joan sees that as a solution as long as his mother's presence doesn't prevent them from having time alone together. So they schedule their time to be alone and the time for her to visit when Henry can also do some repair work at home. They both agree that repair work needed by his mother can be provided by a contractor and paid for by his mother, which she can afford.

Scenario #4: Steve is offended by the way Karen's siblings make fun of him when they are together. He doesn't want to join her in family gatherings. Karen feels that her family acts that way toward everyone, even her, and that Steve will eventually get used to it. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

As long as Karen's siblings make fun of Steve, he will not be enthusiastic about being with them. Her suggestion that he will eventually get used to it is not only incorrect but also disrespectful and not empathetic. Until they can resolve this conflict, Steve should not be with her siblings, and if it offends Steve for Karen to go without him, she should not go either.

Steve suggests that Karen explain to her siblings that he finds their teasing very offensive and that they risk not having a relationship with both of them if they continue. If they ignore her request to be respectful, Steve and Karen will both avoid family events when the siblings are present. Karen thinks about his suggestion and decides that he has a point. Her goodwill toward Steve helps her see his dilemma, and so she agrees to talk with her siblings. She explains that the way they treat Steve hurts her as well as Steve, and if they care so little about them, maybe they should not get together at all. If the siblings respond positively to her request for respect, from then on they will enjoy their time together. If they do not respond positively, then Karen and Steve agree enthusiastically to avoid family events when they are present. In most cases, family members take the suggestion to be respectful seriously, thereby solving the problem.

Conflicts over Career Requirements and Time Management

Scenario #1: Alan's job requires him to travel several days each week, leaving his wife, Carol, feeling neglected and fearful that he might have an affair. Alan feels that his job requirements are something

they must both accept. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

One of my cardinal rules for a happy marriage is to avoid being separated overnight. Separation, even for one night, not only creates a risk for an affair but also prevents important emotional needs from being met on an ongoing basis. Spouses who are alone often complain, as Carol has, that they worry about an affair and that they also feel neglected. Another complaint is that they become disconnected emotionally and have a difficult time reconnecting when their spouse returns home.

The default condition of the Policy of Joint Agreement (do nothing until the issue is resolved) would suggest that Alan forgo any future travel until Carol is enthusiastic about it. He feels that he must travel because his job requires it, but what if it is not a requirement for the company he works for, or if he were to find another job?

Alan tells his boss that being away from home overnight has been a threat to his marriage and requests a job with the company that does not require travel. The boss agrees to his request but gives him a 15 percent cut in pay. Alan and Carol both enthusiastically agree to the new job and the need to tighten their budget.

Scenario #2: Janet brings home work every night and weekend, leaving her husband, Mark, feeling neglected. She feels that eventually she will be able to get work done during regular hours, but for now she cannot afford to get behind or she will lose her job. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

Janet and Mark's problem is not necessarily Janet bringing work home but rather her neglect of Mark. But until they find a resolution, she agrees not to bring work home, even if it means losing her job. That puts their conflict on the front burner, and they spend a weekend thinking of ways they can both be enthusiastic about a resolution.

Janet suggests that they follow the Marriage Builders Policy of Undivided Attention, which recommends that they schedule fifteen hours each week to meet each other's emotional needs for affection, intimate conversation, sexual fulfillment, and recreational companionship. By making time for undivided attention their highest priority, Mark is guaranteed to get the attention he needs from Janet even when she decides to bring home work from the office. Mark enthusiastically agrees to that plan for one month to see if it will really work. After one month, they both enthusiastically agree to the plan permanently.

Scenario #3: Emma feels neglected when her husband, George, plays golf every weekend. George feels that golf is the only way he can relax after a very stressful week. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

The first step toward a resolution of this conflict is for George to stop playing golf while they both think of ways that he can relax without Emma feeling neglected. They could have followed a plan similar to Janet and Mark's plan (spend fifteen hours of undivided attention together with Mark playing golf in whatever remaining time there is) if Emma had not been concerned about the fact that George's favorite recreational activity is something they cannot do together. She wants to find an activity where he can relax yet also enjoy it with her. She wants his relaxation to include her.

So George and Emma start brainstorming about ways that his most enjoyable and relaxing time during the week can also be enjoyable and relating for her and something they can do together. They use the Marriage Builders Recreational Enjoyment Inventory that they downloaded free of charge from the Questionnaires section of the MarriageBuilders.com website to find several activities that they might enjoy together. They include hiking on nature trails, fishing, camping on weekends, horseback riding, and bird watching. They try each of these activities and find that they are all relaxing and enjoyable for both of

them. So they spend every weekend doing one or a combination of them, resolving their conflict.

Scenario #4: Andy and Rachael both work, but she does most of the childcare and housework in the evenings and on weekends, and she is getting only about four hours of sleep each night. Rachael feels that Andy is not sharing the responsibility. Andy feels that Rachael is doing more than is necessary. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

Applying the default condition of the Policy of Joint Agreement (doing nothing until the conflict is resolved) is crucial in resolving every conflict, but in this case, how would it be applied? Does Rachael stop caring for her children? Does she stop doing any housework? While to avoid childcare entirely would be foolish, it is possible for Rachael to cut back until a resolution is reached.

This procedure for a fair division of household responsibilities is described in chapter 10 of His Needs, Her Needs.

First, they both make a list of childcare and household responsibilities that they feel are needed, and then they combine their lists, eliminating duplicates. Then each person selects the items that they enthusiastically want to do exclusively, not wanting or needing the other person's help.

What is left is a list of responsibilities that neither spouse wants to do alone. From that list, they make up a new list of responsibilities that they are both enthusiastically willing to do together, such as washing and drying dishes after dinner and cleaning up the kitchen.

Now what is left is a list of responsibilities that at least one feels are important but neither wants to do. With that list, they each rate the items as to how important it is to do them. Each item is assigned to the one rating it most important. Rachael ends up with the longest list of responsibilities, which she cannot complete and still get eight hours of sleep each night.

The final step is for Andy and Rachael to find ways to pare down her list of responsibilities so that she will always get eight hours of sleep. They hire others to do some of the items, assign some to their children, and eliminate some entirely.

When they are finished, Andy and Rachael have organized their household responsibilities into those that he is enthusiastically willing to do, those that she is enthusiastically willing to do, and those they are enthusiastically willing to do together. Those responsibilities that neither wants to do are either done by others or relegated to the scrap heap. Rachael finally gets enough sleep.

Conflicts over Financial Management

Scenario #1: Carlos feels that because he earns most of their income, he should be able to spend at least some of it as he sees fit. Toni feels that his income belongs to both of them, so she should have a say in how all of it is spent. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

While trying to come to a win-win decision, Carlos should not spend any of their money without Toni's approval. But that's exactly what she wants. So how can this issue be resolved if the default condition of the Policy of Joint Agreement is her position? The answer is to keep this issue on the front burner—to make sure it is being discussed regularly until it's resolved. The default condition of the Policy of Joint Agreement should not be accepted as the final decision.

Many couples create a budget in which almost all of their expenditures are decided jointly. But they reserve a certain amount for discretionary use. That's what Toni and Carlos agree to do. They decide that \$50 per week can be spent by each spouse without having to discuss the purchase together. Certain purchases were ruled out in advance, such as cigarettes and chewing tobacco. When discretionary purchases are made, however, they are to inform each other as to what they bought.

Scenario #2: Kari wants to buy their high-school-age daughter an iPad. Toby feels they can't afford it. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

Kari and Toby's daughter goes without an iPad until they can come to an enthusiastic agreement, but they brainstorm possible resolutions to the conflict and present their ideas to each other on a daily basis. After three days of striking out, Toby comes up with an idea.

"What if Kristi gets a job and uses her income to buy the iPad? Would that work?"

Kari doesn't want their daughter to have to wait for something that she considers an essential part of her education.

"Would you consider giving her the iPad now and having her pay us back for it with the money she earns?"

"Yes, if she promises us that she will find a job on weekends," Toby responds.

They discuss their plan with Kristi, who is more than willing to get a job to pay for the iPad. She already knows of a place that will hire her. Within three months, the iPad is paid for, and Kristi now has a way to save for college.

Scenario #3: John wants to save for retirement while they raise their children, but Melissa wants to save for their children's education. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

When their conflict is first discovered, John and Melissa follow the Policy of Joint Agreement by agreeing that they have not yet decided what to do with their savings. That suits John just fine because the longer they wait to decide, the more likely it will eventually be used for their retirement. But since they must keep brainstorming until they arrive at a mutual enthusiastic agreement, it's unlikely that they will wait that long before one of them thinks of a resolution.

As they both offer possible resolutions that they will find mutually agreeable, they come to a better understanding

of each other's perspective. John also wants their children to attend college, but he wants them to go to state colleges, work part-time, and apply for scholarships to cut the expense. Melissa agrees with John that it is important to save for their retirement, but she feels they can do most of their saving after their children have completed college. She also feels that with the careers they have, they will enjoy continuing to work after they are retirement age.

After negotiating with each other for a few weeks, they come to an enthusiastic agreement. The children will enroll in advanced placement courses and college-level courses beginning in the eleventh grade to try to complete their first two years of college at no cost to them. They will attend a community college if they have not completed their first two years by the time they graduate. After two years of college, they will attend a state college to keep costs down. They will apply for scholarships and student loans, and they will be expected to work full-time during summers to help defray costs. John and Melissa agree to guarantee their student loans and give them an additional \$2,000 per year until they earn their bachelor's degree. After that, each child will be expected to pay for any postgraduate education.

They decide not to retire until they both agree enthusiastically to do so, when there will be enough in savings to support them. But the more they think about it, the more they plan their post-child-rearing years to be more than a time to save for retirement, so they make sure that they enjoy those working years, with plenty of vacation time.

Scenario #4: Tammy wants to eat out after she comes home from work. Wayne wants to save money by having dinner at home. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

The Policy of Joint Agreement is difficult to follow in this example because Wayne and Tammy both have to eat somewhere after work. So while they are negotiating, they decide to continue doing what they have been

doing—eating out two times a week and eating at home the rest of the time. But they both know that this will not be their final solution because, wherever they eat, one of them is dissatisfied with the arrangement.

Every day they give each other ideas that might break the deadlock. Wayne suggests using inexpensive frozen dinners, but no one in the family is too excited about that, including Tammy. Tammy searches for healthy yet inexpensive restaurants that they can go to, but Wayne feels that even if they go to those restaurants, they could save money by eating at home.

Along with a search for healthy yet inexpensive restaurants, Tammy also calculates the cost of preparing dinner at home. To Wayne's astonishment, cooking at home costs more than eating at some of the restaurants Tammy has researched. Since the cost issue is now off the table, Wayne is happy eating out with his family for dinner as long as the bill and tip do not go above their budgeted agreement. They are both enthusiastic about their final decision—and so are their children.

Conflicts over Children

Scenario #1: Dan feels that their high-school-age children should be in bed by 9:00, but Karla feels that it's okay for them to stay up until 10:00. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

Dan wants the children in bed by 9:00 because he wants to be able to spend quality time with Karla and feels that by 10:00 they are both too tired to give each other the attention they need. Karla feels that if the children go to bed at 9:00, they will simply stay awake past 10:00, something that would be upsetting to them.

Until Dan and Karla can enthusiastically decide on a time for bed, they agree to follow the Policy of Joint Agreement and not give their children any rules regarding bedtime. That moves the issue front and center. Every day

they send each other suggested resolutions to the conflict by email.

Dan suggests that they encourage their children to do homework or read in their rooms, not necessarily sleep, so that their mom and dad can have time alone. Karla feels that would be too awkward. She suggests that they plan to have their time together as a date, away from the home earlier in the evening. She feels that the children are old enough to take care of themselves during the early evening. Dan is okay with that idea but wonders how they can make love if they are not at home. Karla suggests that if they get home around 10:00 from their date, the children will be in their rooms, they can say good night, and she might be willing to make love then because they had a romantic date together.

Dan and Karla enthusiastically agree to try the plan four nights a week for two weeks to see if it works as well as they expect. While Karla isn't always in the mood to make love after every date, and Dan doesn't expect it, they still make love far more often than they did prior to this new plan. So after two weeks, they both enthusiastically agree to four romantic dates a week, sometimes during the day on weekends, and the children can stay up until 10:00.

Scenario #2: Katie wants her husband, Jared, to support her when their junior-high-age daughter talks back to her. Jared feels that it's Katie's problem to solve, and he doesn't want to interfere. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

On the face of it, this conflict challenges the basic principles of my approach to marital conflict resolution. Jared's perspective that Katie has problems that should not be of his concern eliminates the possibility of negotiation. However, upon closer analysis, Jared's perspective isn't what it first seems. He actually thinks that Katie has it coming when their daughter, Elsie, talks back to her. He feels that Katie has been disrespectful to Elsie and so Elsie is simply returning the favor.

But Jared is willing to negotiate with Katie, and they both agree to follow the Policy of Joint Agreement until a resolution can be reached. As such, Jared is not required to support Katie when their daughter talks back to her. Every day they suggest ways to solve the problem for both of them.

Jared makes the first suggestion that he will reprimand Elsie if she is disrespectful to Katie on the condition that Katie is not disrespectful to Elsie first. Katie is very offended by that suggestion because she believes that she has the responsibility to judge her own daughter, and her husband should support her in that responsibility. Besides, who will decide if Katie is being disrespectful to Elsie?

Katie must think of a resolution that takes Jared's perspective into account. It must also support her view of child rearing. A very tough assignment indeed.

After giving it a lot of thought, she agrees to stop judging her daughter impulsively and instead discuss each issue with Jared before she says anything to Elsie. If they can't agree on what to say, they will brainstorm or drop the issue entirely. She also agrees not to make demands (tell Jared what to do), be disrespectful (tell him he's wrong), or become angry with him during these discussions.

Jared enthusiastically agrees with her proposal, and she enthusiastically agrees to follow it for a month to see how it will work. As it turns out, their discussion brings wisdom to a very difficult issue in raising teens, and when they agree, they present a respectful, but firm, united front to their daughter. Jared always supports Katie when that happens. When they cannot agree, nothing is said to Elsie, so Jared's support is not needed. After one month, they both agree enthusiastically to continue their new approach to child rearing.

Scenario #3: Phil feels that if their children don't clean up their rooms, they should be forced to simply shut the door and live in the mess. Taylor feels that the children should be punished if they

don't keep their rooms clean. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

Conflicts over child-rearing practices are often about how much freedom of choice to give children. One parent, like Phil, thinks that children should learn to make their own decisions and learn from their consequences, while the other parent, like Taylor, believes that children will suffer unnecessarily unless their parents guide them into wise decisions.

The Policy of Joint Agreement supports Phil's position of doing nothing, but he agrees to discuss the issue and brainstorm every day until they find a resolution that will make them both happy. So they begin their discussion with a temporary agreement that the children will not be punished if they don't clean their rooms.

As a child, Phil never kept his room picked up, while Taylor's room was always neat and clean. Their parents didn't have much to do with either outcome because Phil seemed instinctively messy while Taylor felt awful when anything was out of place. In fact, that difference between them led to many arguments about how clean their home should be. So a resolution to the conflict regarding their children's rooms might also help resolve the general problem of housekeeping.

Phil suggests that a reward be offered for cleaning a room. If by a certain time the child's room is neat and clean, the child will receive one dollar. But if it is not picked up, another child will have the opportunity to clean it for one dollar. The plan accommodates Phil's perspective that some people are born to keep their rooms clean while others are not, and it also accommodates Taylor's perspective that children should be taught the value of keeping their rooms clean. The dollar will provide incentive for each child to clean up after themselves.

They agree enthusiastically to try the new plan for a month, after which they make a few adjustments. For one, they decide to make the reward fifty cents instead of a dollar, and for another, after inspection, they will give a child

whose room doesn't pass muster fifteen extra minutes to finish what was left undone. That plan for the children's rooms is eventually applied to the entire home, where the children become domestic assistants, keeping everything neat and clean—for a reward.

Scenario #4: Colleen wants to help their children with their homework, but Bill feels they should do it themselves. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

This is another conflict over how much freedom of choice parents should give their children. Both Colleen and Bill want their children to succeed academically, but Colleen feels that parents should help them get good grades, while Bill feels that they should earn what they receive. He feels that if parents help with the homework, it isn't the child who deserves the credit.

Until this conflict is resolved, the Policy of Joint Agreement supports Bill's laissez-faire approach. But he agrees to brainstorm possible win-win solutions every day with Colleen until one is found. Bill's problem with Colleen helping the children with homework actually has more to do with Colleen being tied up evenings and weekends, preventing them from having time to themselves, than it does with educational theory. So as they begin their discussion, his concern about not having enough time together is mentioned.

Colleen suggests that they follow the Policy of Undivided Attention by scheduling at least fifteen hours to be with each other every week. That addresses Bill's problem with homework keeping them apart, but what about his concern regarding doing the homework? He enthusiastically agrees to schedule time to be alone with Colleen, and he says he will also help with homework if they don't actually do the homework. If they oversee the homework and, when a child is stuck, help explain the lesson to be learned, he will be an enthusiastic partner with Colleen.

They enthusiastically agree to try that plan for one month, scheduling fifteen hours of undivided attention and also working together to help their children do their homework (but not do it themselves). After the month is over, they both enthusiastically agree that they have found a win-win resolution to a conflict that at first seemed unresolvable.

Conflicts over Sex

Scenario #1: Paul wants spontaneous, unplanned sex, while Leah feels ambushed whenever he wants to make love. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

As soon as this conflict is mentioned, the Policy of Joint Agreement is engaged, which means that there is to be no sex until they can come to an enthusiastic agreement regarding this issue. Since neither spouse wants that draconian measure to apply, they both enthusiastically agree to have planned sex on a regular basis until the issue is resolved.

The problem for Leah is not as much about spontaneity as it is that she needs to be emotionally prepared for sex. And Paul needs some prep time too. His "spontaneity" begins with him thinking about having sex with her before they go to bed together, but he doesn't let her know what's on his mind. So by the time they go to bed, he's ready to go, but she hasn't given it a thought yet. For her it's spontaneous, but for him it's planned.

Leah knows what it's like to think about having sex all day long, and then by the time they're in bed, she's definitely in the mood. Planned sex gives her time to be emotionally prepared to enjoy the experience, just like Paul does.

After discussing the realities of what it takes for both of them to enjoy sex together, they enthusiastically agree that if either starts thinking about having sex, they will tell the other person as soon as possible. Then, even if they have

not planned to make love that day, if they're both in the mood by the time they have an opportunity, they will do it. Planned sex is replaced by a form of spontaneous sex that gives both spouses time to be emotionally prepared.

Scenario #2: Andrea wants to make love in the morning before she and her husband, Evan, get up. Evan wants to make love after they go to bed at night. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

The default condition of the Policy of Joint Agreement while Andrea and Evan are discussing the conflict suggests that they avoid sex mornings and evenings. But it doesn't suggest that they can't have sex at other times of the day. So while they are negotiating, they both agree enthusiastically to get together at home for lunch three times a week and make love then.

Evan makes it clear to Andrea that in the morning he is too involved thinking of what is ahead of him for the day to enjoy making love to her the way she wants—relaxed and unhurried. And Andrea explains that having sex at night doesn't work for her because she begins to fold at about 8:00. Sex is the last thing on her mind by the time she goes to bed.

But as they are brainstorming, it becomes very apparent to them that what they are doing as a temporary fix—making love during lunch—is working out much better than either had expected. So they both enthusiastically agree to continue their temporary resolution on a permanent basis.

Scenario #3: Joel wants his wife, Sandy, to wear very sexy nightgowns to bed. Sandy wants to wear pajamas. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

In this case, the default condition of the Policy of Joint Agreement is precisely what Joel wants most and what Sandy wants to avoid—wearing nothing to bed. So in this

case, Sandy should continue to wear whatever makes her comfortable while they discuss the issue. Sandy explains that she has tried wearing sleepwear that Joel has given her in the past, and it made her feel very uncomfortable. She could hardly sleep when she wore it, to say nothing about the fact that it inspired him to grope and grab her all night. Pajamas seem to be a much better alternative. But Joel feels that pajamas are her way of rejecting him sexually every night when she goes to bed.

After expressing their perspectives to each other, they make suggestions every day that might resolve the conflict. Sandy suggests that she wear a nightgown of her choosing—a compromise between pajamas and a sexy nightgown. Joel suggests that she try wearing a variety of sexy nightgowns until she finds one that she feels comfortable wearing. Both suggestions are rejected. But, eventually, Sandy comes up with a resolution that they can both be enthusiastic about. Whenever they make love, she will wear to bed a sexy nightgown that Joel has given her. But after making love, she will change into her pajamas. They try doing that for a few weeks and find that it not only increases the frequency of their lovemaking but also gives them both a much more restful and complete sleep.

Scenario #4: Trudy wants to make love in the dark, while Mike wants to make love with all of the lights on. What are some of the ways that both spouses could be happy without a change in their perspectives?

As with our first example, the Policy of Joint Agreement suggests that they not make love until they arrive at a resolution. Since neither wants that to happen, they enthusiastically agree that they will tentatively make love with the lights out.

Trudy explains to Mike that she feels on display when the lights are on, and that keeps her from enjoying the experience with him. Mike can understand how she might

feel that way, but he lets her know how visual he is when it comes to sex. What makes him enjoy the experience is being able to look at her while making love.

As they explore ways to make love that will not make Trudy feel on display and yet Mike can see her, they consider making love during the day when the light from outside will be sufficient. No lights will be on, and yet Mike can see Trudy while making love to her. They try making love during the day, and it works for both of them. Trudy does not feel uncomfortable with the drapes drawn, yet they let enough sunlight in for Mike to see her.