

Practical Peacemaking

Does the world feel less peaceful to you than it once did? If so, you are not alone. In fact, when asked to describe politics in the United States these days in a single word or phrase, recent polling shows that an overwhelming majority of Americans (79%) express a negative sentiment and 55% always or often feel angry.

Anger and contention are exhausting — mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Even in these circumstances, we are commanded to become peacemakers and to proclaim peace. These materials are designed to teach skills associated with peacemaking.



SECTION I

Gospel Foundation

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” (James 3:18)

“Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.” (1 Peter 3:11)

“And even I myself have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed . . . to establish peace throughout the land.” (Mosiah 29:14)

“Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace.” (D&C 98:16)

“And lift up an ensign of peace, and make a proclamation of peace unto the ends of the earth.” (D&C 105:39)

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention. . . . [T]his is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.” (3 Nephi 11:29-30)

“And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. And it came to pass that the thirty and seventh year passed away also, and there still continued to be peace in the land.” (4 Nephi 1:2-4)

President Russell M. Nelson taught: “Contention . . . infects our civic dialogue and too many personal relationships today. Civility and decency seem to have disappeared during this era of polarization and passionate disagreements.

. . .

“I am greatly concerned that so many people seem to believe that it is completely acceptable to condemn, malign, and vilify anyone who does not agree with them.

. . .

“[T]his should not be. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to be examples of how to interact with others—especially when we have differences of opinion.

. . .

“Differences of opinion are part of life.

. . .

“[W]e can literally change the world — one [person and one interaction at a time. How? By modeling how to manage honest differences of opinion with mutual respect and dignified dialogue.” (“Peacemakers Needed,” General Conference April 2023).

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught: "Conflict is inevitable. It is a condition of mortality. It is part of our test. Contention, however, is a choice. It is one way that some people choose to respond to conflict.

...
"Our world overflows with contention. We have 24/7 access to it: on the news, on social media, and even, at times, in our relationships with those we love.

"We cannot adjust the volume on others' bitterness, wrath, or rage. We can, however, choose our response. We can choose a better way — the Lord's way!

...
"Let us emulate the gentle Christ." (Education Week Devotional, August 17, 2021)

Elder Uchtdorf also acknowledges, "Of course this is easy to say and difficult to do. To refrain from contending with those who contend requires great discipline. But that's what it means to be a disciple." (Education Week Devotional, August 17, 2021)

CONTENTION VERSUS CONFLICT

Contention

- May be generated with evil intent
- May or may not be about disputed values
- Can cause harmful emotions
- Unproductive and obstructive to finding solutions
- Characterized by contempt, hostility, and sometimes violence

Conflict

- Natural outcome of agency — should be expected
- Concerns or values of opposing parties are (or appear to be) incompatible
- Can be emotionally neutral
- Offers opportunities for productivity and progress
- Will still exist within loving relationships

President Nelson taught, "Hostility builds no one. **Contention never leads to inspired solutions.** Regrettably, we sometimes see contentious behavior even within our own ranks. We hear of those who belittle their spouses and children, of those who use angry outbursts to control others, and of those who punish family members with the 'silent treatment.'" ("Peacemakers Needed," General Conference April 2023)

SECTION II

What Is Peacemaking?

"Peacemaking calls people of all backgrounds to build belonging, connection, and trust as the foundations of a beloved community. . . . As a central component of the gospel, peacemaking is a way to reconcile people to God and one another. [I]t speaks to [our] identity as 'ambassadors for Christ.'

...
"But peacemaking is more than just keeping the peace. It requires the hard work of moving through [conflict] so that we can realize a more united future." (The Peacemaker's Toolkit, 2023, p.2)

Peacemaking is always active and engaged. It asks us to be loving but not compliant, and it demands that we **move toward conflict** with respect for all parties involved. In Biblical times, peacemaking involved stepping between two warring parties and seeking to broker resolutions. This can also be true today; however, just as often, true peacemakers are a party to the conflict. In those situations they will initiate reconciliation when others have wronged them and be eager to repent when they have wronged others.

False ideas about peacemaking can inhibit our ability to accomplish it.

PEACEKEEPING VERSUS PEACEMAKING

Peacekeeping

- *Passive*
- *Avoids conflict at all costs*
- *Imposes values on others*
- *Prioritizes outward impressions*
- *Can be accomplished by coercive and violent means*

Imagine children arguing. *Their parents want them to stop, so they make them stop by sending them to their rooms and isolating them from each other. This will keep the peace for a time, but it doesn't create lasting peace or resolve a conflict.*

Peacemaking

- *Active*
- *Acknowledges conflict and requires engagement*
- *Recognizes and honors values of both parties*
- *Prioritizes inner wellbeing and healthy systems*
- *Can only be accomplished by awareness, willingness, and nonviolent means*

Imagine children arguing. *Their parents bring them together, help them express themselves calmly, make sure everyone feels understood, and then help them find a compromise or resolution. Peacemaking takes more work, but its results are most beneficial for all involved.*

NEGATIVE PEACE VERSUS POSITIVE PEACE

Negative Peace

- *Absence (or reduction) of violence, but fear of violence can remain*
- *Can be achieved through coercion or force (there might still be unrest around the edges)*
- *Stagnant — maintaining the status quo*

Negative Peace *might be a home surrounded by barbed wire and heavily armed guards. There is an absence of direct violence, but the fear of violence is apparent.*

Positive Peace

- *More than just the absence of violence*
- *Presence of justice, health, equity, human dignity, empathy, trust, belonging*
- *Transformational — continuously evolving and developing the quality of relationships*

Positive Peace *might be a home where people come and go freely without any worry that harm will come to them. There is an absence of indirect or structural violence. The people have plentiful opportunities for growth.*

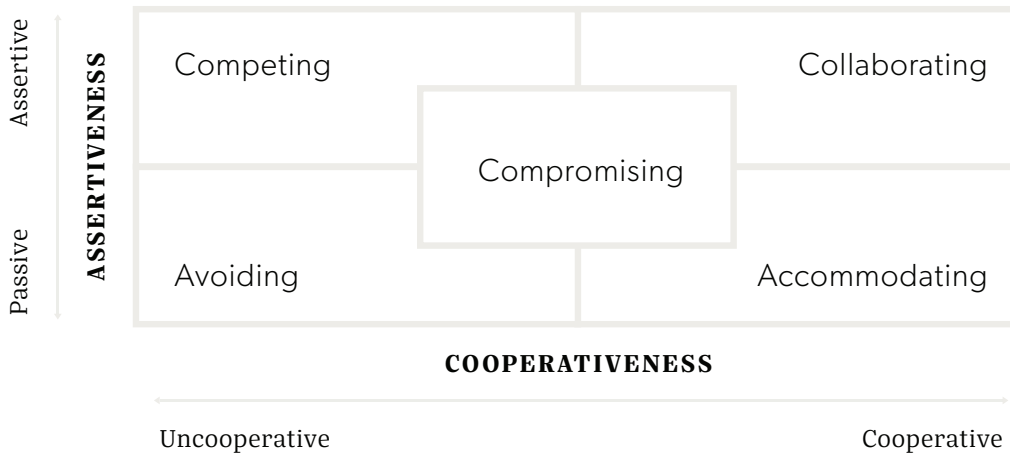


SECTION III

Five Approaches to Conflict

Many of us have been trained to avoid conflict. But avoidance isn't peacemaking. We all experience political, racial, familial, and religious points of conflict. The peacemaker knows there is no peace without reconciliation — which requires work, communication, and compromise.

There are five approaches to conflict — five general ways individuals handle interpersonal conflict. By learning about these approaches, we can become more aware of the choices we make in various conflict settings.



This specific model was designed to show how individuals handle interpersonal conflict.

A simple way to visually outline this model is on a graph. It begins by labeling two basic dimensions of conflict behavior: assertiveness and cooperativeness.

On the Y axis, assertiveness (the amount of effort you make to try to satisfy your own concerns, meet your needs, or receive support for your idea).

On the X axis, cooperativeness (the amount of effort you make to try to satisfy others’ concerns or needs, or how receptive to others’ ideas you are).

Next, we will look at where the five different conflict styles are situated on the graph.

It is important to be aware of the five different conflict styles so we can learn to recognize and understand the ways we consciously or subconsciously choose to engage in conflict in certain situations. The conflict style we choose in times of stress, tension, negotiation, or crisis will impact how those conflicts unfold.

1 Avoiding

Avoiding does not create ultimate peace. It is unassertive and uncooperative. With this conflict style, you work to sidestep the conflict without attempting to satisfy either individual’s concerns. Typically, avoiding conflict will not create peace. However, in certain situations, individuals may choose to step away to gain clarity or may need to remove themselves if the circumstances become dangerous.

It may be appropriate if:

- You need time to think through the situation before moving forward with a resolution.
- The issue is so trivial there is no point in putting time and energy into dealing with it.
- It makes sense to cool things down before addressing the conflict.
- Safety is a concern.

2 Accommodating

Individuals who accommodate may put the needs of others before their own. These individuals generally value their relationships over their own goals but may not leave a conflict satisfied. If accommodating is your primary approach, be aware that it often leads to feelings of resentment or loss of identity.

It may be appropriate if:

- The issue is trivial and the outcome really doesn’t matter.
- It is important to let the other person learn from their own mistakes.
- You need to build trust.
- Short-term sacrifice has a high probability of building toward long-term collaboration.

3 Competing

Competing is assertive and uncooperative. Individuals who compete try to satisfy their own concerns at the other person's expense. They may view being right as more important than preserving the relationship with the other party. This style is generally ineffective. It can damage relationships and result in a loss of trust.

It may be appropriate if:

- A quick, decisive action is required in an urgent or high-stakes situation.

4 Compromising

Compromise means both sides are willing to give something up to gain something in return — a middle ground between two positions. Individuals with this style are willing to try to find an acceptable solution that only partially satisfies both individuals' concerns.

It may be appropriate if:

- The people who are in conflict are willing to be flexible.
- The affected individuals will be satisfied with getting part of what they want.
- It is a situation where collaboration isn't possible.
- It is a situation in which a position of strength allows you to cede ground.

5 Collaborating

Individuals who collaborate are both assertive and cooperative as they work with others to find solutions that are beneficial and completely satisfy the concerns of all involved. These individuals see conflict as an opportunity to improve the quality of relationships and find a win-win solution. Collaboration is the best way to achieve long-term solutions. It will effectively build peace, connection, belonging, trust, and healthy relationships.

When to use:

- The concerns of everyone involved are of utmost importance.
- There is a high degree of trust among everyone involved in the conflict.
- Resources can be shared and cooperatively allocated.

WHAT IS BEHIND MOST CONFLICTS?

Unmet needs. *When needs are not met it can result in suffering, pain, and affliction — often, this is why people initiate conflict.*

Summary of the Five Conflict Styles — When both parties are aware, willing, and prepared, collaboration is the most effective conflict style in peacemaking. Avoiding, accommodating, competing, and compromising can be useful conflict styles depending on the situation.

Before choosing which approach to use, it is necessary to evaluate several factors, including the importance of the relationship, your desired outcome, overall safety of participants, power differentials, and willingness of the other party.

With practice and intention, everyone can learn skills to enable them to become collaborators.



For Discussion and Self-Reflection

Know yourself.

In order to know which approach to conflict is best, you need to know yourself. Here are some questions to ponder.

- *What are my personal or guiding values and principles?*
 - *Examples: loyalty, compassion, fairness, equality, love, obedience*
- *What limitations and strengths do I bring to communication?*
 - *Do I get defensive, anger easily, get flustered, or shut down when conflict arises?*
 - *Do I listen easily? Am I receptive to new information?*
 - *Do I share my views easily?*
- *Where will I not compromise? Is that resistance based on principle or is it stubbornness?*
- *Where does my sense of identity spring from? Are these true sources of identity, or have I adopted them from culture and society?*
- *What boundaries do I have that need to be respected?*
- *What personal experiences do I bring to conflict? (These can be positive or negative experiences.) What are other perspectives or experiences I could consider?*

Know what you want to accomplish.

To determine which peacemaking approach you use, you need to know what you want to accomplish. Goals differ depending on the situation. Not all conflicts are equal, and we shouldn't feel required to bring the same energy and attention to them. Nor are they all going to be solved using the same tools.

- *What are your goals? What situations can you think of in which these different goals would be the best choice?*
 - *Diffuse tension and violence*
 - *Live with or alongside someone with different values or capacities*
 - *Persuade an individual or a group*
 - *Solve a problem (personal or shared)*
 - *Create something new*

Know how to act as a peacemaker.

In addition to knowing yourself and knowing what you want to accomplish, it's important to learn **how** to act as a peacemaker. There are people who spend months, years, and decades learning these skills. This presentation is simply an introduction.



Scenarios to Practice

Scenario 1: How to diffuse conflict in a low-stakes setting.

You are interacting with a person you are loosely connected to, perhaps in a retail store or at a community event. How can you allow the person to feel heard, leave them with an opportunity for self-reflection, and reinforce that the person matters in spite of your disagreement? This will model how to love someone while still not affirming their position.

ASK

- "Tell me more about this..."
- "What led you to this belief?"
- "Is there any information that might lead you to change your mind?"

REPEAT

Summarize their statements to demonstrate that you understand.

PIVOT

"We both feel strongly about this issue. Let's find some other way to connect."

*This doesn't resolve anything, but **does it add more peace to the world?***

Scenario 2: When your goal is to live alongside someone with different values or capacity.

This is a way to approach someone you love and care about, but you are having conflict about a position or idea. The idea here isn't to convince anyone but rather to maintain the relationship.

LISTEN	Listen to understand and withhold judgment. Demonstrate physical openness, perhaps by making eye contact. Engage in active listening by summarizing to show that you understand: "So, you're saying that..."
ASK	Ask questions to unearth values. "Tell me more..." "How does this affect you or your loved ones?" Listen silently.
SHARE	Share a personal story; connect and be vulnerable. Articulate shared values.
ASK	Invite your partner to do the same.

Have you found common ground? **How can this approach create peace?**

Scenario 3: Imagine a difficult conversation you have had in the past.

Share the situation with a partner.

- What is a phrase that stops the conversation?
- What is a value you shared with the person you were in conflict with?
- Is there anything you would have handled differently if given the chance?
- Were you able to come away from the experience with a greater understanding about the other person or their position?

President Nelson taught: "Let us show that there is a peaceful, respectful way to resolve complex issues and an enlightened way to work out disagreements.

...

"The Savior's message is clear: His true disciples build, lift, encourage, persuade, and inspire — no matter how difficult the situation. True disciples of Jesus Christ are peacemakers.

...

"Peacemaking is a choice. You have your agency to choose contention or reconciliation. I urge you to choose to be a peacemaker, now and always." ("Peacemakers Needed," General Conference April 2023)

In a 2017 Deseret News opinion piece titled "To Be a Peacemaker Is to Be a Creator, a Visionary, and a Champion," Eva Witesman wrote:

"There are two ways to interpret the concept of 'making peace.' The first is to avoid conflict; to acquiesce. As in, 'I have made peace with the fact that we disagree.' Or 'I have made peace with the way things are.' After this manner, peace is maintained by keeping quiet, by biting one's tongue, by falling in line. By going gently into that good night.

"This is not the kind of peace I want to make.

"When I make peace, I want to build it. From the ground up if I have to. Like a first responder who runs toward the flames, or a soldier who runs toward the good fight, I believe a peacemaker is the sort of person who runs toward conflict and builds peace with her words and her own two hands.

"To be a peacemaker is to be a creator, a visionary, a champion.

"Peacemaking is not for the faint of heart."

Ultimately, personal peace as well as societal peace comes from the Prince of Peace. As His followers, we can do much to share His light and His peace with others. We can be instrumental in creating a peaceful society. As we follow Christ, we can learn to be peacemakers.