

# Identifying Patterns of Unresolved Conflict

Directions: Think about a typical argument that ends up with one or both of you striking out at the other. Then fill out the boxes describing what happened, your thoughts and feelings during the disagreement, and your behavior in response to the disagreement. Continue to explain the cycle until you have addressed the resulting physical aggression.

What happened?

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1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_

How did you respond?  
What did you do?

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1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_

What did you think  
about what happened?

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1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_

How did you feel at  
the time?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Think about your pattern of conflict and then answer the following questions.

1. If there was a place at which you would interrupt or stop this pattern before the physical aggression began, where would that be?

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2. How does your behavior contribute to the cycle of aggression?

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3. What impact do your actions have on your partner?

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4. What behaviors are you responsible for?

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## Therapist guide for Working Through the Identifying Patterns of Unresolved Conflict Worksheet

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Instruct your clients to think about a typical argument that ends up with one or both of them becoming aggressive with one another.

You will need to provide a handout for each partner, as this assignment may be difficult for them to complete together.

If the couple experiences difficulty focusing on their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and instead begins to argue or blame, redirect them as necessary. Regardless of whether the violence is bi-directional or unidirectional, many times the non-aggressive partner is aggressive verbally or through non-verbal expressions. Help each partner explore how their actions could have contributed to the end result, keeping in mind that most couples with mild-to-moderate violence have bi-directional aggression.

This session is meant to increase awareness of their own actions and the impact their actions have on their partner. Prompt them to take responsibility for their contribution as needed. Be cautious in placing responsibility on a client when their actions did not perpetuate the violence.

After they have completed the Pattern of Unresolved Conflict worksheet, instruct them to reflect on their cycle of conflict. Direct them to answer the follow-up questions individually:

- 1. If there was a place at which you would interrupt or stop this pattern before the physical aggression began, where would that be?*
- 2. How does your behavior contribute to the cycle of aggression?*
- 3. What impact do your actions have on your partner?*
- 4. What behaviors are you responsible for?*

After they have reflected on the questions individually, encourage them to discuss what they've learned about themselves through this exercise. Reinforce the importance of taking personal responsibility (when appropriate). Ask them how they may be able to help one another in preventing the cycle if they decide to work together as a team to fight this cycle of violence.

After completing this session, please refer to the Pathways to Resolution worksheet, which will guide couples to work together to identify new ways of working through their problems.