

# Conflict ... The Vast Enigma

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## John Martin, Esq. Bio

### Professional Background:

Registered Mediator | Arbitrator | Conflict Coach with Louisiana State Bar and Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution

### Practicing Attorney for 22+ years:

- Louisiana State Bar Association – active member (subcommittees: Dispute Resolution, Restorative Justice, and Family Law)
- U.S. Middle District Court of Louisiana
- State Bar of Georgia – active affiliate member (subcommittees: Child Protection and Advocacy, Dispute Resolution, and Family Law)
- American Bar Association – active member in good standing (subcommittees: Dispute Resolution and Family Law)

### Professional Affiliations:

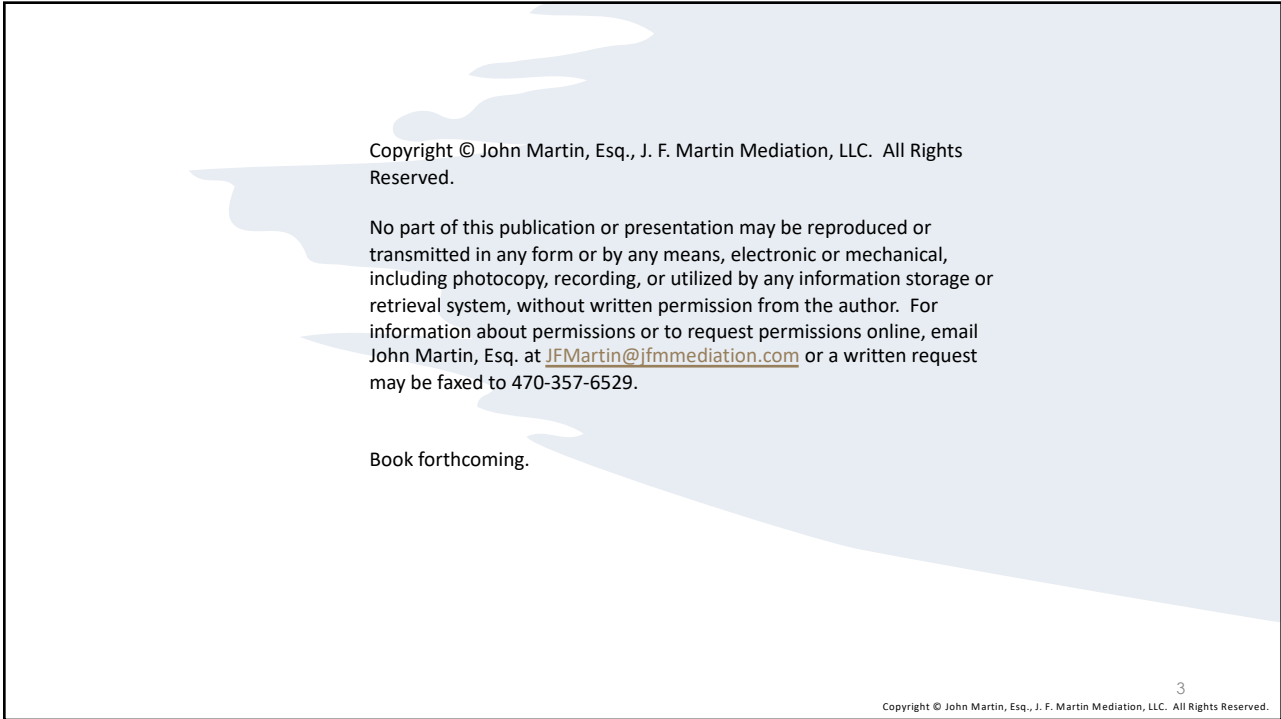
- Atlanta CASA – Member of the Board of Directors
- National Association of Counsel for Children
- Academy of Professional Family Mediators
- Association of Family and Conciliation Courts
- Association of Conflict Resolution
- International Academy of Collaborative Professionals
- Child Welfare League of America

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## ***What is Conflict and is it good or bad?***

- “Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals” (Hocker and Wilmont, 2018, p.3).
- Conflict is ***neither*** good or bad – what gives conflict life is the emotions one attaches to it and the form of communication (or lack thereof) used to express such emotions.
- Conflict is supported by a great deal of personal emotion and is complex simply because an individual’s feelings and thoughts that are involved.

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## ***Dealing with Interpersonal Conflict***

- Examples of Conflict within our daily lives?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- Why do you feel conflict is so difficult to address as an adult?
- What about for a child?
- How do you think an “at-risk” child deals with conflict?
- Can you imagine how difficult conflict may be for struggling parents?

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## ***Five General Behavioral Styles***

Raines, S. S. (2020)

Generally speaking, there are five predominant behavioral styles an individual may display when confronted with interpersonal conflict:

1. Avoidance
2. Accommodation
3. Collaboration
4. Compromise
5. Competition

The type of style or styles that an individual may deploy during a conflict is largely influenced by how the individual was raised, their culture, and how their family traditionally dealt with conflict – may be fueled by generational patterns.

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## ***Avoidance Behavioral Style***

Raines, S. S. (2020)

Generally exhibited by an individual who has:

- Past negative experiences with disagreements and conflict – perhaps caused by an imbalance of power,
- Usually view themselves in low power position as opposed to the other party,
- Typically view conflict as a win-lose rather than an opportunity to compromise,
- Often has a history of trauma (abuse or neglect) and prefers to avoid uncomfortable situations,
- Characterized more often than not as being an introvert, and
- Avoiders tend to suppress or bottle-up their feelings until they cannot hold back any longer and simply explode.

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## ***Accommodation Behavioral Style***

Raines, S. S. (2020)

Generally exhibited by an individual who:

- Is more inclined to sacrifice his or her position or desired outcome for that of the other conflicting party,
- Values the interpersonal relationship with the opposing party and prioritizes harmony between all parties,
- Often compromises in order not to offend others and minimize conflict, and
- Tends to sacrifice more often than not which may lead to internalized feelings of being exploited and frustration.

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## ***Collaboration Behavioral Style***

Raines, S. S. (2020)

Generally exhibited by an individual who:

- Values working together in an effort to reach an outcome acceptable to all parties,
- Exemplified by a willingness to share vital information and make decisions jointly with a focus on satisfying all interests,
- Often views conflict as an opportunity to work together positively to reach a solution,
- Strives for a win-win scenario for all parties involved, and
- Effective collaboration becomes more difficult the greater number of parties involved.

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## ***Compromise Behavioral Style***

Raines, S. S. (2020)

Generally exhibited by an individual who:

- Is more inclined to reach a compromise somewhere in the middle between the parties' respective positions,
- Often seen in situations where the decision to be reached between the parties is not critical and the time in which to negotiate is rather short,
- Focus as to the end result between the parties is more of fairness, and
- Agreement is typically reached through integrative rather than distributive negotiations.

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## ***Competitive Behavioral Style***

Raines, S. S. (2020)

Generally exhibited by an individual who:

- Approaches conflict as a winner takes all, take no prisoners,
- Has little to no regard to any continued relationship following negotiations or resolution of the conflict,
- Communication tends to be direct with no regard to the feelings or desires of the opposing party,
- Often viewed by others as being aggressive, assertive, and insensitive, and
- Typically seen in situations where the time to make a decision is short and must be unilaterally made.

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## Circumplex Model of Affect

Hocker and Wilmot (2018)

The Circumplex Model of Affect, proposed by James A. Russell in 1980, eloquently organizes an individual's general emotions into four primary sectors.

Activation	Unpleasant	Pleasant
High	tense, nervous, stressed, upset	alert, excited, elated, happy
Low	sad, depressed, bored	contented, serene, relaxed, calm

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# Conflict Style Inventory

## Assessing Your Conflict Style

Hocker, J.L. and Willmot, W.W. (2001). *Interpersonal Conflict (10 ed.)*, New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Education.

### Purpose

1. To identify your conflict style
2. To examine how your conflict style varies in different contexts or relationships

### Directions

1. Think of two different situations (A and B) where you have a conflict, a disagreement, an argument, or a disappointment with someone, such as a roommate or a work associate. Write the name of the person for each situation below.
2. According to the scale below, fill in your scores for Situation A and Situation B. For each question, you will have two scores. For example, on Question 1 the scoring might look like this: 1. 2 | 4
3. Write the name of each person for the two situations here:

Person A \_\_\_\_\_ Person B \_\_\_\_\_  
**1 = never                      2 = seldom                      3 = sometimes                      4 = often                      5 = always**

Person A	Person B	
1.		I avoid being "put on the spot"; I keep conflicts to myself.
2.		I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.
3.		I usually try to "split the difference" in order to resolve an issue.
4.		I generally try to satisfy the other's needs.
5.		I try to investigate an issue to find a solution acceptable to both of us.
6.		I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with the other.
7.		I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.
8.		I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.
9.		I usually accommodate the other's wishes.
10.		I try to integrate my ideas with the other's to come up with a decision jointly.
11.		I try to stay away from disagreement with the other.
12.		I use my expertise to make a decision that favors me.
13.		I propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.

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# Conflict Style Inventory

Person A	Person B	
14.		I give in to the other's wishes.
15.		I try to work with the other to find solutions that satisfy both our expectations.
16.		I try to keep my disagreement to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.
17.		I generally pursue my side of an issue.
18.		I negotiate with the other to reach a compromise.
19.		I often go with the other's suggestions.
20.		I exchange accurate information with the other so we can solve a problem together.
21.		I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with the other.
22.		I sometimes use my power to win.
23.		I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.
24.		I try to satisfy the other's expectations.
25.		I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved.

Source: Adapted from "Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict: First-Order Factor Model and Its Invariance Across Groups," by M. A. Rahim and N. R. Magner, 1995, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 80(1), 122-132. In W. Willmot and J. Hocker (2011), *Interpersonal Conflict* (pp. 146-148). Published by the American Psychological Association.

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# Conflict Style Inventory

Scoring: Add up your scores on the following questions:

A/B	A/B	A/B	A/B	A/B
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
16.	17.	18.	19.	20.
21.	22.	23.	24.	25.
 A/B Avoidance Totals	 A/B Competition Totals	 A/B Compromise Totals	 A/B Accommodation Totals	 A/B Collaboration Totals

### Scoring Interpretation

This questionnaire is designed to *identify* your conflict style and *examine* how it varies in different contexts or relationships. By comparing your total scores for the different styles you can discover which conflict style you rely most heavily upon and which style you use least. Furthermore, by comparing your scores for Person A and Person B, you can determine how your style varies or stays the same in different relationships. Your scores on this questionnaire are indicative of how you responded to a particular conflict at a specific time and therefore might change if you selected a different conflict or a different conflict period. The Conflict Style Questionnaire is not a personality test that labels or categorizes you; rather, it attempts to give you a sense of your more dominant and less dominant conflict styles.

- Scores from 21 to 25 are representative of a very strong style.
- Scores from 15 to 20 are representative of a strong style.
- Scores from 11 to 15 are representative of an average style.
- Scores from 6 to 10 are representative of a weak style.
- Scores from 0 to 5 are representative of a very weak style.

# Core Concerns Framework

Hocker and Wilmot (2018)

Another way of understanding the emotions expressed within any conflict is to consider the **Core Concerns Framework** pioneered by researchers at the Harvard Negotiation Project.

These five core concerns serve as a lens by which to view conflict and a pulse check to stimulate integrative discussions and negotiations:

1. An **appreciation** for the concerns of the other party (not demeaning or dismissing the other's position),
2. **Have the autonomy** and freedom to express oneself,
3. **Affiliation** by establishing a connection with the other party without showing rejection,
4. **Status** that the parties are equally empowered, and
5. **Role and recognition** that the parties are on equal footing.

## ***Layton's (1999) Three-Step Model of Forgiveness: injured innocence, obsession, and transcendence***

Hocker and Wilmot (2018)

Step One: ***Injured Innocence stage*** - one questions his/her fundamental beliefs as to what transpired and the notion that if he/she was a good person, how could they be wronged by another.

Step Two: ***Obsession stage*** - wronged person replays over and over the circumstances giving rise to the conflict and asking questions such as "How could he/she do this to me?" or "What did I do to deserve this betrayal?". This stage serves as a period whereby the wronged person is struggling to come to terms with the betrayal and make sense as to what has happened.

Step Three: ***Transcendence stage*** - person no longer view themselves as the sole injured party and obsess with the "how" and "why". Instead, they come to a sense of peace and realize that good can still come from the unfortunate chain of events.

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## ***Forgiveness and Reconciliation***

Hocker and Wilmot (2018)

***Forgiveness*** is not only bestowed upon the person responsible for the harm caused but more importantly, to permit the injured party to achieve a sense of freedom – to bring closure to the conflict.

***Reconciliation***, as the final stage of the conflict resolution process, is characterized as the once conflicting parties attempting to repair the broken relationship, reengage with each other, and rebuild trust.

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## 5 Steps to Active Listening

Raines, S. S. (2020)



1. Inquire from the parent his/her perception of the conflict,
2. Give the parent your undivided attention (builds trust),
3. Maintain positive body language and keep eye contact to convey that you are engaged and interested,
4. Use open ended questions to encourage the parent to express their full feelings as to the conflict (i.e., Tell me how does this make you feel?),
5. Avoid expressing any shared experiences (i.e., I had a similar experience, let me tell you how I dealt with it).

REMEMBER ... Avoid interrupting. This is the parent's opportunity to express his/her feelings as to the conflict and your role is to assist in **exploring forward thinking approaches** to effective resolution of the conflict.

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## Tea Kettle Analogy

- If the struggling parent has limited to no positive support network, has poor coping skills, and internalizes his or her frustrations and emotions, their ability to constructively address conflicts is extremely difficult.
- Without an ability to effectively communicate and express their emotions, and properly appreciate and address conflict, tensions and frustration build leading to explosive behavior similar to a boiling tea kettle without any release spout.

YOU, whether a trainer or a mentor, have the ability to make a lasting impression on the parents we touch.



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