

## **Conflict Resolution Therapy** By Susan Heitler, Ph.D.

The premises of **Conflict Resolution Therapy**, developed by psychologist Susan Heitler, Ph.D., were first laid out in full in Dr. Heitler's 1990 book *From Conflict to Resolution*. This book brought conflict resolution techniques from the world of business and legal mediation into the world of psychotherapy. A subsequent audio, taped live at a training session for therapists, *Working with Couples in Conflict* (1994), then offered examples of Dr. Heitler demonstrating her treatment methods.

In 1996 when the editors of a Newbridge Communications master therapist video series decided to include a video on couple treatment, they chose Dr. Heitler's conflict resolution treatment as exemplifying the best of couple therapy treatment strategies. They chose this treatment strategy because most couples seek therapy "for help resolving our conflicts." In this regard, conflict resolution therapy methods focus on what clients most often want from their treatment. In addition the treatment method is focused, fast-moving, and efficient. It incorporates techniques for rapid exploration of family of origin sources of dysfunctional patterns. At the same time it emphasizes coaching the communication and conflict resolution skills that enable couples to sustain a positive relationship. The resultant Master Therapist video (now on DVD), *The Angry Couple: Conflict Focused Treatment* (1997), is currently utilized in graduate school couple-therapy training programs across the US and internationally.

After publishing the initial book on conflict resolution treatment, which was for therapists, Dr. Heitler focused on producing self-help psycho-educational materials making the lessons of conflict resolution treatment available to the general public. **The Power of Two** book and workbook, available in English plus six foreign language editions, sets forth the communication and conflict resolution skills for successful marriage partnership. The audio CD's topics include treatment strategies for reducing depression and anxiety, as conflict resolution therapy methods can guide treatment in individual, couple, and/or family therapy treatment formats.

**Overview of Conflict Resolution Therapy** Conflict resolution therapy rests on the premise that unpleasant negative feelings emerge in response to situations of conflict. If effective conflict resolution skills enable the triggering conflict to move to resolution, well-being resumes. If conflict resolution skills are insufficient however, negative feelings continue to fester and grow.

This premise applies to conflicts within a person-- conflicts for instance between someone's desires and what they feel they should do. It applies similarly to conflicts between people, such as between a spouses, a parent and child, or co-workers--and to conflicts between people and difficult circumstances such as illness or economic difficulties. The therapy methods therefore are useful for helping distraught individuals, couples, and/or families.

The primary job of a therapist therefore is to guide clients to a healthy win-win resolution of their upsetting conflicts, that is of the issues, problems and differences that have provoked negative feelings. A win-win resolution results in removal of depression, anxiety, anger and other negative emotions.

In addition to facilitating resolution of existing conflicts, however, conflict resolution treatment teaches the skills that will enable clients to address future upsetting circumstances more effectively on their own.

A conflict resolution therapist thus wears three hats:

- 1) Guide. A conflict resolution therapist offers skilled mediation guidance, leading clients through to win-win resolution of both their conflicts.
- 2) Coach. A conflict resolution therapist teaches the repertoire of techniques of conflict resolution that enable people to sustain personal well-being and smooth-flowing relationships. These techniques include communication skills, emotional self-regulation, ample expression of positive feelings, and collaborative problem-solving.
- 3) Healer. Conflict resolution interventions heal troubled relationships, and also relieve individuals' distressed feelings such as anxiety, depression, anger and generalized upset.

### **Resources Related to Conflict Resolution Therapy**

Dr. Heitler's website, [www.therapyhelp.com](http://www.therapyhelp.com), offers multiple articles, each explaining various aspects of conflict resolution treatment. These can be downloaded for free. Also on Dr. Heitler's website, <http://therapyhelp.com/bio.htm> offers a free audio interview from *How To Choose a Therapist.com* which explains conflict resolution treatment premises and techniques.

On <http://www.lifestyle.org/article.php?id=78>, a video of a television program shows Dr. Heitler conducting therapy with a real couple, accompanied by explanations of her couple therapy methods.

For fun interactive games that teach the principles of anger management, communication and conflict resolution from Dr. Heitler's book *The Power of Two*, go to [http://poweroftwo.org/expectant\\_parents\\_project.php](http://poweroftwo.org/expectant_parents_project.php). These games, paid for by a government Healthy Marriages Initiative grant, are designed to help couples build healthy marriages. Be sure to scroll down beneath the initial game to find the treasure trove of many more.

The website [www.po2.com](http://www.po2.com) offers interactive group workshops that teach conflict resolution and related skills for relationship success. This page also offers free diagnostic tests for your relationships.

*The Angry Couple*, the Master Therapy video of Dr. Heitler showing and explaining how to treat a couple with conflict resolution therapy techniques, can be purchased at [www.psychotherapy.net](http://www.psychotherapy.net).

For a complete listing of conflict resolution treatment publications -- books, audios and video programs - see <http://therapyhelp.com/booksandtapes.htm>.

### **Books Related to Conflict Resolution Therapy**

**From Conflict to Resolution**, Susan Heitler

**The Power of Two: Secrets to a Strong & Loving Marriage**, Susan Heitler

**The Power of Two Workbook**, Susan Heitler and Abigail Hirsch