

TABLE 8 CONFLICT RESOLUTION SEQUENCE	
Steps	Secrets to Success
EXPRESS YOUR INITIAL POSITIONS	<p>Say it, don't hint.</p> <p>Symmetry: Did both of you express your initial positions?</p> <p>Summarize by defining the problem in a no-fault, umbrella way that includes both and blames neither.</p>
EXPLORE THE UNDERLYING CONCERNS listing all the concerns of each of you on one joint list	<p>Use the Four Ss. If you are getting stuck, ask yourselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we maintaining <i>symmetry</i>, exploring equally both of our concerns? • Are we giving long speeches or talking in <i>short segments</i>? • Are we talking in generalities or in <i>specifics</i>? • Have we put together a <i>summary</i>, listing all the concerns each of us has, as a bridge to the third step, finding solutions?
DETERMINE MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE SOLUTIONS responsive to all the concerns	<p>Create solution options by adding modifications to your original positions and by devising completely new options.</p> <p>Think in terms of solution sets, taking into account all of the concerns.</p> <p>Summarize the plan, to be certain you both leave with the same understanding.</p> <p>Ask the final essential question: Are there any pieces of this that still feel unfinished?</p>

As Nate and Nicole discovered, intensifying an ineffective strategy just evokes more intense versions of the same responses. At some point, a proverbial straw may break the camel's back, and one partner either gives up or explodes—yielding depression or toxic emissions. In a branch of mathematics called catastrophe theory, an early form of chaos theory, the point at which a system suddenly shifts from smooth to turbulent flow is called the critical point. In marriage, it usually is called a fight.



Stop, look, listen

As suggested in Chapter 5, *stop*, to step out of the current debate, cool down, and gain a broader perspective. Then *look* and *listen* to understand more fully your partner's perspective.