



Resolving Conflict to Maintain a Balance



By Darsi Beauchamp, PhD

Conflict resolution has been a buzzword for many years, but what exactly is conflict resolution? According to Webster's, it is "a way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them. The disagreement may be personal, financial, political or emotional." How simple is it for people to find a peaceful solution in this day and age? Improper behavior may be the cause for concern and may stem from many situations and issues. For example, if children watched their parents have a discord and the children were removed from the scene and never saw and heard a solution to the problem, then those children will not have learned how to resolve a conflict. Parents believe that children should be sheltered from their conflict, when in reality having the children present when a conflict begins is the problem. Once the children are exposed to the conflict, the best possible scenario is for the children to be present during the resolution phase.¹ This allows the children to learn how to resolve situations when they are confronted with an issue that requires them to make educated decisions and arms them with better tools to resolve conflicts in their lives.² Otherwise, the children will not learn these skills and will grow up utilizing the "fight or flight"

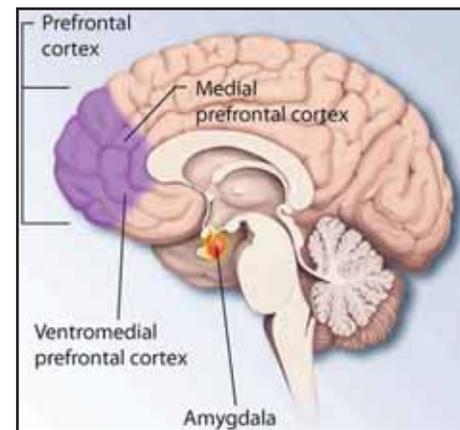
choice. In most cases, we know exactly how these situations end up: in escalation or running away from the problem.

There are several brain structures I want to mention before we can understand the "fight or flight" choice versus the "logic and reasoning" choice. Lately we have seen a lot of the "fight or flight" choice in our country. The part of the brain that regulates being fearful, being in danger or being negatively emotional over a situation is the amygdala. Research indicates that when we are fearful, in danger or emotionally driven, our frontal cortex does not have the capacity to be logical. God gave us a choice for when we are in danger: run and defend ourselves or think about it, but we cannot do both—the brain does not have the capacity to activate both the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex all at once. However, since we are not always in danger, we can choose to be logical by activating our frontal cortex instead for decision-making. In other words, the amygdala tells us we are under some sort of stress, and the frontal cortex analyzes to indicate whether or not it is logical to react instead of cognitively responding to the situation.³

Our mental state is determined by how we respond to a situation, and our reactions, driven by inner thoughts and past experiences, will definitely be demonstrated by our outward behavior in a stressful situation. Let us examine this further. If our parents reacted angrily, then children will

react the same way, because those are the only skills they learned, unless the children were taught tools on how to resolve conflict. The problem is compounded by people existing in a difficult state of being, coupled with anxiety about their future, worries about a job, reactions toward personal relationships, and no therapy to provide the tools on how to respond; it then becomes a mixture of pure negative emotions that are driven by anger, and reactions that can lead to hurt others and ourselves without the logical cognitive thought processing we need to be able to handle a difficult situation.

To properly manage such situations, we must first learn to calm down our emotions—our amygdala—and then act accordingly. We should only be reactive when we are, in fact, in danger, when we are being chased, attacked or threatened. Children learning about, and living in, these stressful situations will actually have their brains altered by their experiences. The children will not know how to properly respond in simple situations and then will display inappropriate and maladaptive behaviors. In fact, the research already mentioned by Salzman and Fusi, 2010 at Columbia University is clear. There is no way to tell what is first—the emotion or the physical reaction. Does the thinking create the physical reaction or does the physical reaction create the emotion that provides the behavioral response? One thing is for sure, we must practice mindfulness, relaxation, meditation and breathing to calm down our senses before making major decisions and before speaking or responding. There are so many ways



we can cope with stress to reduce our anxiety,⁴ inclusive of resorting to therapy to learn new skills and tools to cope with life and be successful at reaching true balance. If you or a loved one has a dysregulated amygdala in constant anger, fear or stress, please see a psychotherapist and a health care provider.

Dr. Beauchamp is a psychotherapist with a master's in family therapy and is a LAC who uses CBT/DBT, biofeedback, neurofeedback, hypnotherapy for children and adults in her practice in Morristown.⁵ She works with neuropsychologist Dr. Barbara Couvadelli, who performs neuro-psych testing. For more information, you can contact Dr. Beauchamp at 973-400-9794. Insurance is accepted.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3829624/>

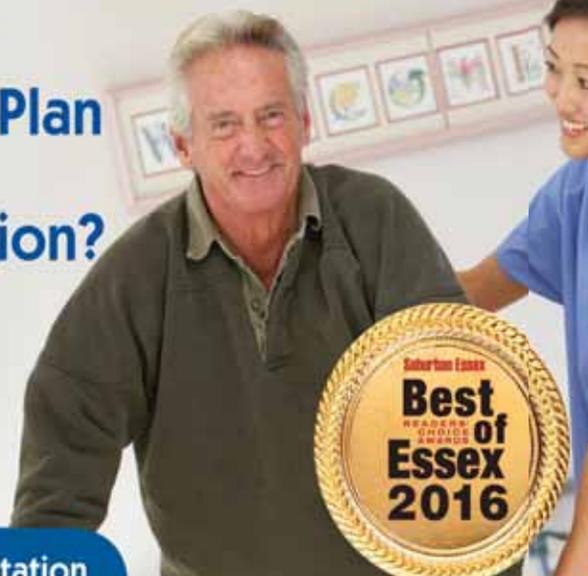
² <http://www.raisingofamerica.org/amygdala-prefrontal-cortex-connection-crucial>

³ <http://www.neurotheory.columbia.edu/pdfs/SalzmanFusi2010.pdf>

⁴ http://www.umca.org/img/File/12_101%20Ways%20To%20Cope%20With%20Stress.pdf

⁵ Dr. Beauchamp's doctorate is in administration.

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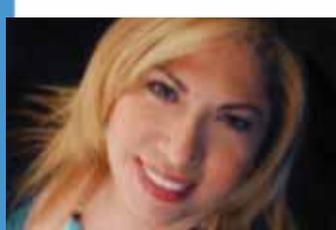
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