

The Conference Table

Jay Adams:

Few persons who come for counseling have been in the habit of solving interpersonal problems daily. That is one reason why they are having difficulty. (Competent to Counsel, 231)

The conference table is a regular family meeting designed to improve the family's communication and to help them avoid or resolve conflict *daily*. It provides a practical, structured, daily means for dealing with grievances. The fact that it is *practical* and *structured* gives hope. Something orderly and coherent is being done to address the problem. The fact that it is *daily* keeps bitterness and resentment from building up (Eph 4:26-27).

The Conference Table Rules:

1) The head of the home must lead

As head of the home the husband/father calls and leads the conference. He should open and close in prayer. The conference should be held at the same table each day. Just the habit of sitting down there at the same time every day will help family members assume the right attitudes for a God-honouring discussion.

2) The rules of communication

The husband/father should review a few basic biblical rules of communication. This must especially be done if previous conferences have been shipwrecked by wrong attitudes or hurtful words.

- Prov 15:1 Gentle words and tones of voice must be used. Gentle questions replace angry accusations.
- Prov 18:13 Interrupting is not allowed.

3) One issue at a time

Discussion begins with a list of items the participants believe need to be discussed. The husband/father must determine the order in which the items are to be discussed (considering others more important than himself). Each issue must be handled separately. Mixing issues always hinders problem solving.

4) Begin with what you did wrong

Discussion regarding a conflict situation must *always* begin with each participant acknowledging how he responded wrongly in that situation or what he could have done differently to keep the problem from occurring. Starting with these admissions

and a request for forgiveness means that the conversation begins with humble words, rather than angry accusations.

5) When the rules are broken

Sometimes during the course of a discussion the rules regarding attitude, voice inflection, and dealing with one issue at a time will be violated. If this occurs, any of the participants in the conference table have the right to stand up. This is the signal that indicates that he or she believes biblical communication is no longer taking place. This signal allows matters to be brought under control before tempers flare. This done, the person sits down and the conversation continues.

Arguing over whether a rule was violated is not allowed. The person who broke the rule must revise his words or attitudes (even if he believes he was misinterpreted). He does so because he understands his inability (or unwillingness) to see his own sin, and considers the other person's analysis of the situation above his own.