

THE MUSLIM COUPLE'S GUIDE

To Turning Conflict Into Intimacy



Bonus: 9 Practical
Love Actionables



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A primary reason of divorce is not knowing how to repair from conflict.

That's dangerous because **ALL couples will fight** - there's no way around it. So instead of fearing conflict, I say **welcome it**.

“How couples repair is what separates the relationship Masters from the Disasters,”
Dr. Gottman, founder of The Love Lab in Washington.

The beautiful part about conflict is not only that it's natural, **it can be intimate**.
Before I give you the key tools to turn conflict into intimacy, here are a few points
you should keep in mind:

1. Not everything can be resolved. Recognize that repair and staying connected is more important than resolving everything.
2. Many of our tactics and ways of dealing with conflict is hard-wired from our upbringing. Rest assured, with training and hard work, this can be reversed.
3. Don't avoid conflict. Look at it as an opportunity for intimacy. By implementing the steps below you can navigate through conflict so both of you come out closer and stronger as a couple.

THE THREE PARTS OF YOUR **RELATIONSHIP** REPAIR TOOLBOX ARE



How to repair before conflict

During the conflict

After the conflict



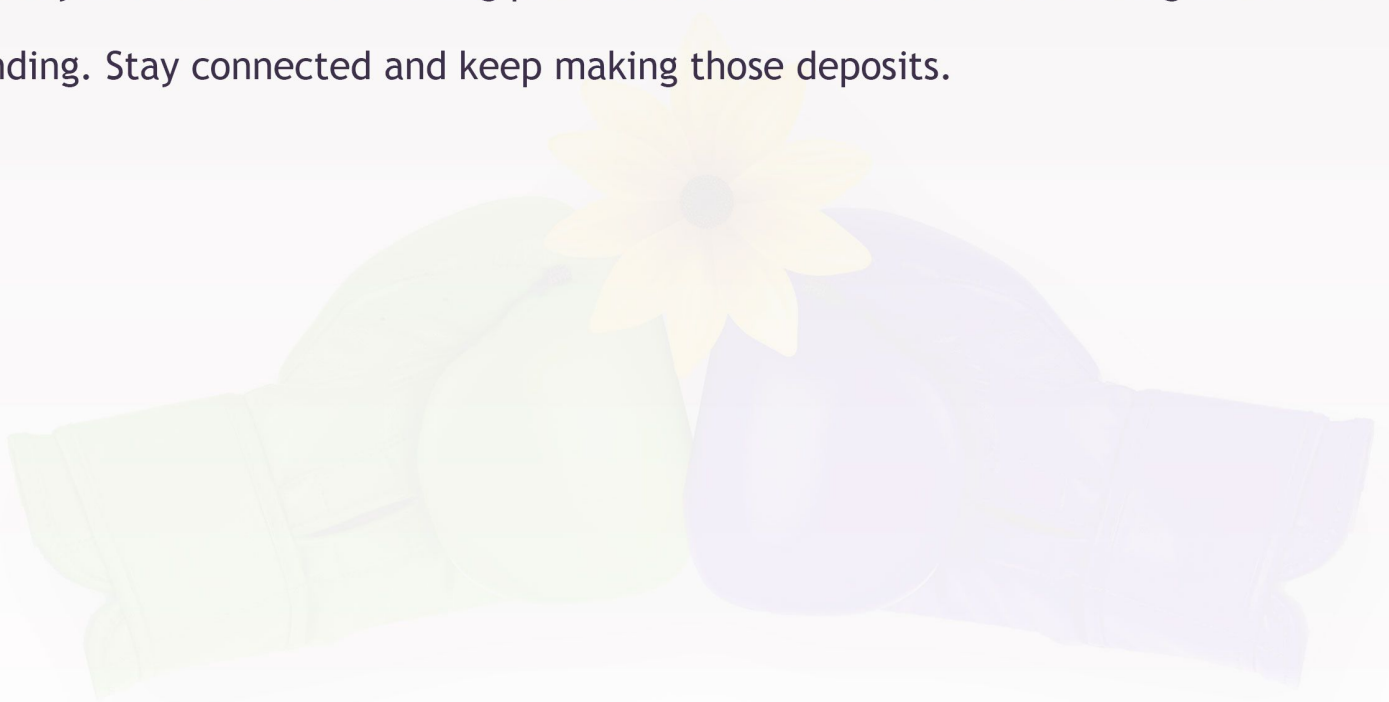
BEFORE CONFLICT

There is an analogy a lot of marriage therapists use and I love it. My husband and I (like most couples) make our regular monthly contributions to our savings and investments so that we are always prepared for a rainy day, and have something to fall back on. Preparing for conflict in a marriage is very much like this. You have to continually be making emotional deposits with YOUR spouse so that when conflict does arise you can make those withdrawals, and not be on empty, or even worse, be in overdraft.

So what does it mean to make an emotional deposit with one's spouse? It could be as simple as giving compliments to your spouse throughout the week, appreciating their efforts, giving each other a little extra attention when they don't ask for it, picking up a gift during the week on your way home, or making a random phone call to each other during the day.

It's important to point out that for this tool to be effective you have to know what has weight/value to your spouse. Example, my husband loves acts of appreciation, it means so much to him if I go out of my way to get the car cleaned or make something he loves. For me a special surprise, compliments mean a lot. We have to know what our spouse values and give them that, not what we value (Great book for this is "the Five Love Languages", but I would argue we have more than five). Don't just assume your spouse values the same things you do. This is where knowing your spouse's love language really helps.

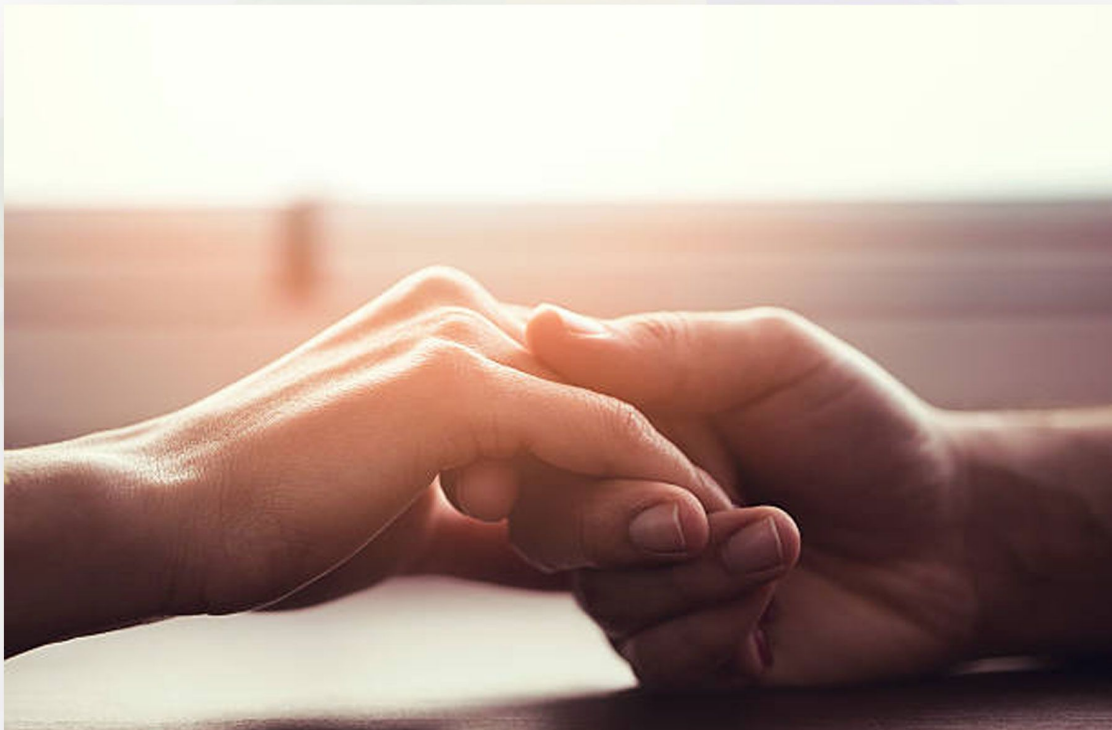
When we're making these consistent deposits, it gives us a cushion for when we have a conflict or difficult conversation. This makes the impact much easier because the emotional bank is really full. You're creating an environment where your partner feels loved, safe and supported by you. This allows the conflict to have a cushion. Imagine falling down without a parachute while skydiving, the thought of that makes me cringe. On the other hand, landing with a parachute, won't hurt, can still be scary, but you're prepared for the landing. You want to be the skydiver that has a working parachute and can use it when coming in for a landing. Stay connected and keep making those deposits.



LOVE ACTIONABLES

- Make emotional deposits daily (a smile, compliment, appreciation, surprise call mid-day) and know the love language for your partner and do the things their love language values (Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, and Physical Touch).
- Do a daily check in and ask each other “how close do you feel to me today?”
- Ask each other regularly “what can I do to make you feel more connected?”

Inshallah if you start doing these things regularly, watch how much easier your landing will be in those conflicts.



DURING THE CONFLICT



**“STRONGLY CONNECTED COUPLES REALIZE THEIR
RELATIONSHIP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PROBLEM.”**



Back in elementary school I remember my basketball coach always reminding us to look at where we wanted the ball to go. He would always remind us not to look at the sidelines, or the other players but always at the net where we wanted to shoot. When you're in a conflict with your spouse and specially the heated kind where voices are loud, emotions are high, you want to remember this rule: focus on the goal.

One of the worst advice given to all couples is “never go to sleep angry at each other”. Sure, this is great if you're just bickering. This shouldn't be the case when it's a heated conflict. Sometimes the best thing IS to sleep it off. When emotions are raging HIGH things can get worse if you continue to be in that zone with each other. One of the most important skills everyone needs when dealing with conflict is being able to find a way out, to decrease that pressure eg. a timeout, sleeping, prayer, a walk.

The *Prophet Muhammad (SAWS)* said in a authentic hadith: *“If one of you got angry while standing then sit down, or if sitting down then lay down. If anger does not go away then do Wudu”*. The Prophet (SAWS) gave us many examples on how to deal with anger. Just make sure you take that time to release the pressure, calm down and gain perspective.

By reflecting on your thoughts during the conflict, you begin to see how misplaced they were, and not reflective of your true reality. In the heat of conflict your emotions and mindset can almost be described like a bull looking at a bull's-eye and all he sees is RED.

What you really want to do is reflect on all the amazing qualities about your spouse and marriage. The things that are going really well in your relationship at that time. The only way to do this is once you've reached the calm state. This allows you to gain that bigger perspective. Take the time out, sleep, do whatever you have to do to get out of that state of anger, and then start focusing on the good things.

If you're only going to focus on the negative, that's all you're going to see and that's all you're going to keep hitting. When we have conflict we start pulling out all the negative things that we can think of, and run a highlight-reel at that point in our brain. We like to overlook all the positive in that moment. By calming down, and focusing on the good you allow an opportunity for repair to start.

LOVE ACTIONABLES

- Take a timeout, release the pressure.
- Focus on the positive qualities of your spouse/relationship
- Reflect on where you want to go in the conflict



AFTER THE CONFLICT

DON'T START WITH, "I'M SORRY!" Our first instinct is to apologize for what we've done. Since we were kids we've been taught that the first thing you do after you have fought with someone or hurt them is to apologize. This doesn't always transfer over in marriage, and sadly won't give you the results you're hoping for.

I like to call it the ABC of repairing. **The A is for accountable**, be accountable for what you've done, own your part in the conflict. Once we can recognize and take ourselves to account, it shows that we know where we went wrong. If you just apologize and insert "but I meant to..", this isn't an apology, this is a defense. By being accountable you open the opportunity for repair. And remember, an apology isn't complete until it's accepted. If you're the one receiving the apology accept it, and ask for what you still need.

The B is for BE Empathetic. You can never be too empathetic in your relationship with your spouse. By sharing in their pain, seeing the hurt caused in that conflict, having empathy towards your spouse, showing you acknowledge their perspective, allows your spouse to also open the gateway to be empathetic towards you. We instantly let our guard down and allow for the connection to be established. This is how we break the cycle of defense and argument. There's so many beautiful examples from the Seerah of the Prophet (SAWS) being empathetic with his spouse's when he would have a difference of opinion. This allows for both of you to have a space for conversation around the issue and feel vulnerable with one another. This is where the magic happens and deep connection really forms.

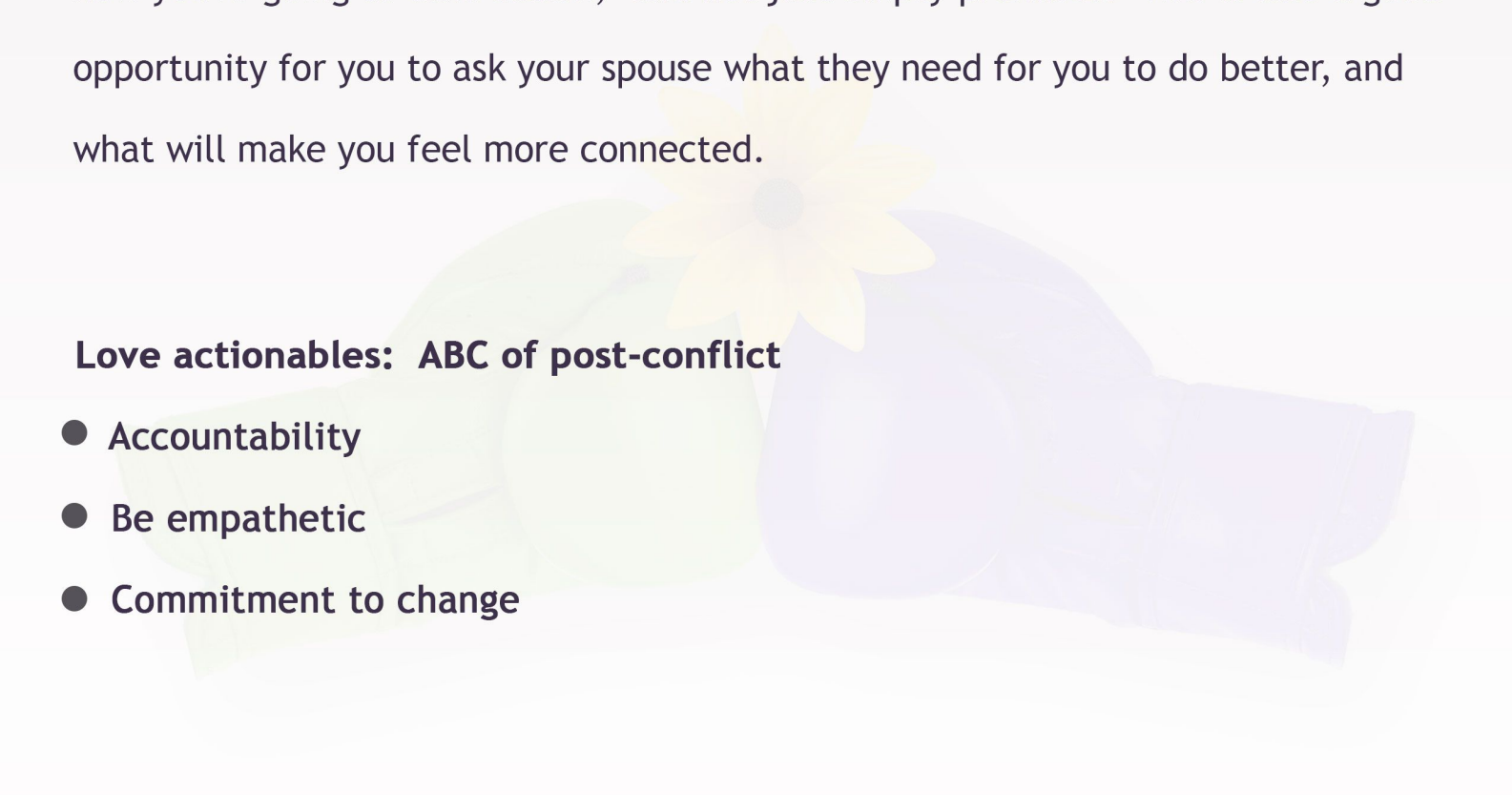
C is for Commitment to some type of change. This is the part after a conflict where one of the spouses will apologize and say that they are going to change “it won't be like that next time”. This does not work !!! Just like with anything in life we want clarity on what change looks like, what that plan of action will be. Making your words really count. After you have taken accountability for your actions by recognizing what you did, then shown empathy to your spouse, and allow that connection to form, now you can explain what that action will look like next time. Here are some examples:

- **Conflict:** you always forget to take the garbage out,
- **Commitment:** “you know what, I'm going to set a date every Monday and Wednesday I will take the garbage out so I don't forget”
- **Conflict:** “You don't plan special outings “
- **Commitment:** I will share my schedule with you at the beginning of each month, so we plan date nights”.

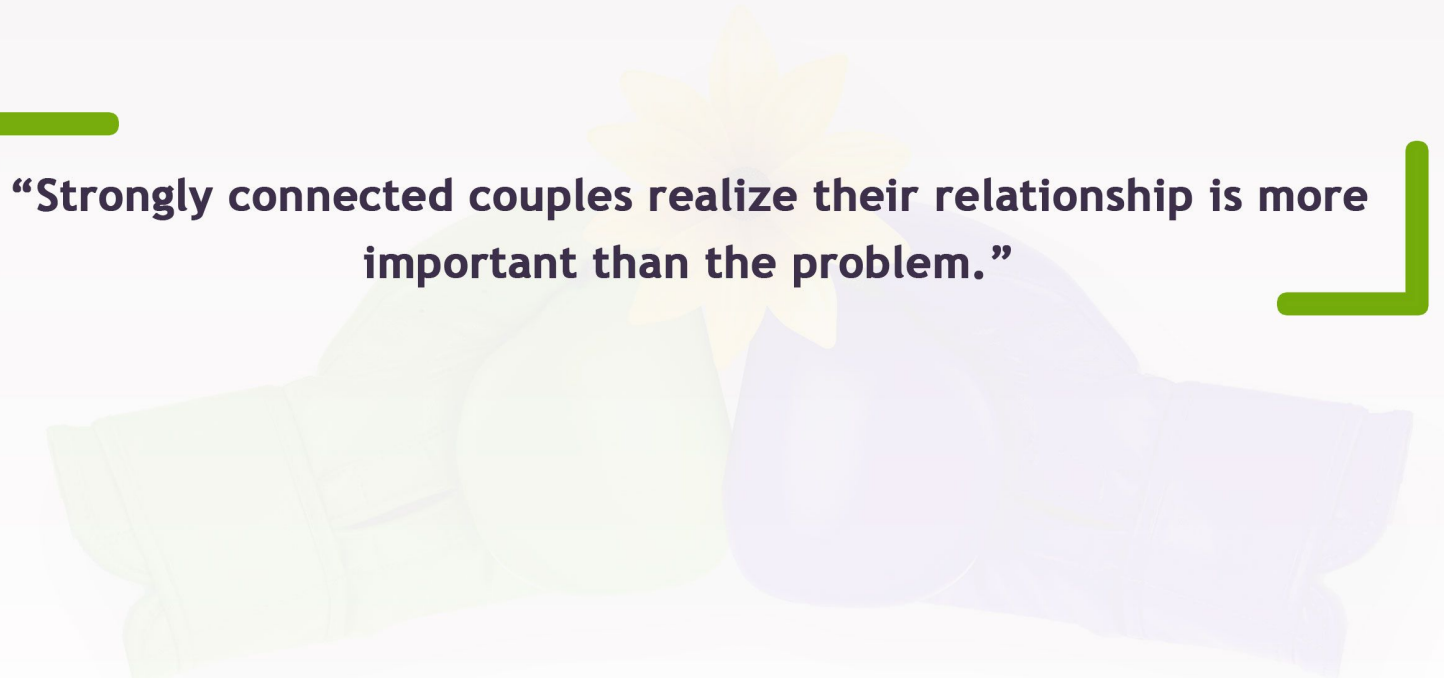
This allows your partner to see you're serious and you've actually thought about how you're going to take action, and not just empty promises. This is also a good opportunity for you to ask your spouse what they need for you to do better, and what will make you feel more connected.

Love actionables: ABC of post-conflict

- Accountability
- Be empathetic
- Commitment to change



Sit down with your spouse and follow this process for one of your recent conflicts that you had. Remember it takes practice practice practice. The more you follow this flow, the next time you have a conflict it won't end with you slamming doors, or having a shouting match, but working on repair. “Can anything really be learned about the practice of an art except by practicing it, and love is the greatest of Arts .” Erich Fromm.



“Strongly connected couples realize their relationship is more important than the problem.”

May Allah put His infinite blessings and peace in
your marriage