

Practical Peacemaking

Does the world feel less peaceful to you than it once did? That isn't your imagination. In addition to wars and regional conflicts, recent polling shows that Americans self-report being angrier than they were even just a few years ago. Nine out of ten Americans admit to being more contentious and rude in online engagement, which is where many of us spend a lot of time. Anger and contention are exhausting — mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Even in these circumstances, we are commanded to become peacemakers and to proclaim peace. These materials are designed to teach skills associated with peacemaking.



SECTION I

Gospel Foundation

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” (James 3:18)

“Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.” (1 Peter 3:11)

“And even I myself have labored with all the power and faculties which I have possessed . . . to establish peace throughout the land.” (Mosiah 29:14)

“Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace.” (D&C 98:16)

“And lift up an ensign of peace, and make a proclamation of peace unto the ends of the earth.” (D&C 105:39)

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.” (3 Nephi 11:29)

“And it came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift. And it came to pass that the thirty and seventh year passed away also, and there still continued to be peace in the land.” (4 Nephi 1:2-4)

“The Savior’s message is clear: His *true* disciples build, lift, encourage, persuade, and inspire — no matter how difficult the situation. True disciples of Jesus Christ are peacemakers. . . .

“Contention drives away the Spirit — every time. Contention reinforces the false notion that confrontation is the way to resolve differences; but it never is. Contention is a choice. Peacemaking is a choice. You have your agency to choose contention or reconciliation. I urge you to *choose* to be a peacemaker, now and always.” (Russell M. Nelson, “Peacemakers Needed,” Liahona, May 2023)

“Conflict is inevitable. It is a condition of mortality. It is part of our test. Contention, however, is a choice. Our Lord Jesus Christ — our model of perfection — did not live a life free of conflict. He was opposed throughout His ministry, and in His final hours He was betrayed by a friend, accused by false witnesses, slandered, beaten, bloodied, and crucified.

“What was His response?

“To some, He did not speak a word. To others, He spoke the simple truth — not in anger but with calm majesty. As others contended with Him, He stood in His place — trusting in His Father, calm in His testimony, and firm in the truth.” (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Five Messages That All of God’s Children Need to Hear” [Brigham Young University Education Week devotional, Aug. 17, 2021], speeches.byu.edu)



What Is Peacemaking?

In order to understand what peacemaking is, we have to understand what it is not. False ideas about peacemaking can inhibit our ability to accomplish it.

Peacemaking is always active and engaged. It asks us to be loving but not compliant and demands that we move toward conflict with respect for all parties involved. In Biblical times, peacemaking involved stepping in between two warring parties and seeking to broker resolutions. This can also be true today; however, just as often, a true peacemaker is a party to the conflict. In those situations, they will initiate reconciliation when others have wronged them and be eager to repent when they have wronged others.

Many of us have been trained to avoid conflict. But avoidance isn't peacemaking. We all experience political, racial, familial, and religious points of conflict. **The peacemaker knows there is no peace without reconciliation** — which requires work, communication, and compromise.

TERMS TO KNOW

- *Contention versus Conflict*
- *Negative Peace versus Positive Peace*
- *Peacekeeping versus Peacemaking*

CONTENTION VERSUS CONFLICT

Contention

- *May be generated with evil intent*
- *May or may not be about disputed values*
- *Emotional state*
- *Unproductive*
- *Characterized by anger, heat, and sometimes violence*

Conflict

- *Natural outcome of agency — should be expected*
- *Concerns or values of opposing parties are (or appear to be) incompatible*
- *Can be emotionally neutral*
- *Offers opportunities for productivity and progress*
- *Will still exist within loving relationships*

NEGATIVE PEACE VERSUS POSITIVE PEACE

Negative Peace

- *Absence of violence, but fear of violence can remain*
- *Can be achieved through coercion or force (there might still be unrest around the edges)*
- *Stagnant*

Positive Peace

- *Absence (or reduction) of violence and fear*
- *Presence of “positive components” that enable and sustain peaceful growth and peaceful change*
- *Transformational*

Negative Peace might be a home surrounded by barbed wire and heavily armed guards. There is an absence of direct violence, but the fear of violence is apparent.

Positive Peace might be a home where people come and go freely without any worry that harm will come to them. There is an absence of indirect or structural violence. The people have plentiful opportunities for growth.

PEACEKEEPING VERSUS PEACEMAKING

Peacekeeping

- Avoids conflict at all costs
- Imposes values
- Can be accomplished by coercive and violent means
- Prioritizes outward impressions
- Passive

Imagine children arguing. Their parents want them to stop, so they make them stop by sending them to their rooms and isolating them from each other. This will keep the peace for a time, but it doesn't create lasting peace or resolve a conflict.

Peacemaking

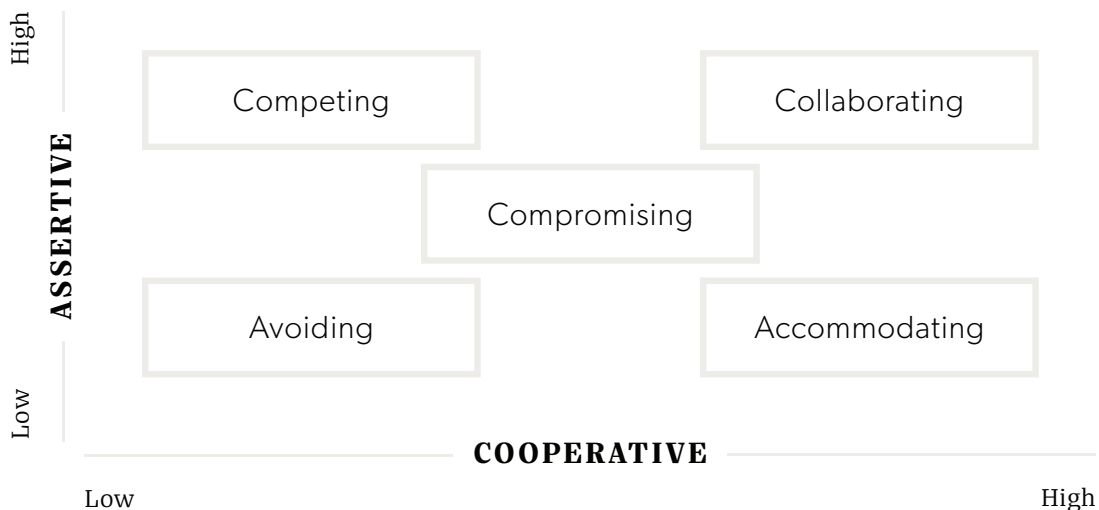
- Acknowledges conflict and requires engagement
- Recognizes and honors values and priorities of both parties
- Can only be accomplished through persuasion and cooperation
- Prioritizes inner well-being and healthy systems
- Active

Imagine children arguing. Their parents bring them together, help them express themselves calmly, make sure everyone feels understood, and then help them find a compromise or resolution. Peacemaking takes more work, but its results are most beneficial for all involved.



SECTION III

Five Approaches to Conflict



1 Competing

Competing is assertive and can be uncooperative. Individuals who compete value their own goals over the goals of others. They may view being right as more important than preserving the relationship with the other party. There are situations when this is the best approach.

When to use:

- When a quick, decisive action is required, such as in an emergency situation.
- When you are certain that you are correct or acting in the best interest of all parties involved. This is best used by a person who is acting within the realm of their expertise and has the authority to make decisions for others.

Example: When Jesus announced his ministry at the synagogue in Nazareth, he did so with authority, but without malice or pride. See Luke 4:16-22.

2 Avoiding

In many situations, avoiding conflict does not create peace. However, in other situations, individuals may choose to step away from a situation to gain clarity. This may even include giving up their goals, or even giving up a relationship, to avoid conflict.

When to use:

- *You need time to think through the situation before moving forward with a resolution.*
- *The issue is one that is so trivial there is no point in putting time and energy into dealing with it.*
- *It makes sense to cool things down before addressing the conflict.*

Example: *When the scribes and Pharisees confronted Jesus with a woman who had been taken in adultery, He initially responded "as though he had not heard them" by writing on the ground. See John 8:3-11.*

3 Accommodating

Individuals who accommodate may put the needs of others before their own. These individuals generally value their relationships over their own goals but almost never leave a conflict satisfied.

When to use:

- *The issue is trivial and the outcome really doesn't matter.*
- *Harmony is more important than either resolving the situation that is in conflict or than being exacting about boundaries and rules.*
- *It is important to let the other person learn from their own mistakes.*

Example: *Jesus responded to a Gentile woman's plea to heal her daughter. See Matthew 15:21-28.*

4 Compromising

Compromise is both sides willing to give up something to gain something in return: a middle ground between two positions. Individuals with this style are willing to make some level of sacrifice in order to find an agreement.

When to use:

- *The people who are in conflict are willing to be flexible.*
- *The affected individuals will be satisfied with getting part of what they want.*
- *As a back-up plan for collaboration, in situations where a win-win outcome isn't possible.*
- *Situations in which a position of strength allows you to cede ground.*

Example: *Jesus taught his disciples to render "unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." See Matthew 22:16-22.*

5 Collaborating

Individuals who collaborate are both assertive and cooperative as they work with others to find solutions that are beneficial to everyone. These individuals see conflict as an opportunity to improve relationships and reduce tensions.

When to use:

- *The concerns of everyone involved are of utmost importance.*
- *There is a high degree of trust among everyone involved in the conflict.*
- *Resources can be shared and cooperatively allocated.*

Example: *When the people He had been teaching were hungry, Jesus collaborated with His disciples to feed them with loaves and fishes. See Matthew 15:32-39.*



SECTION IV

For Discussion and Self-Reflection

Know yourself.

In order to know which approach to conflict is best, you need to know yourself. Here are some questions to ponder.

- *What are my personal or guiding values and principles?*
 - *Examples: loyalty, compassion, fairness, equality, love, obedience*
- *What limitations and strengths do I bring to communication?*
 - *Do I get defensive, anger easily, get flustered, or shut down when conflict arises?*
 - *Do I listen easily? Am I receptive to new information?*
 - *Do I share my views easily?*
- *Where will I not compromise? Is that resistance based on principle or is it stubbornness?*
- *Where does my sense of identity spring from? Are these true sources of identity, or have I adopted them from culture and society?*
- *What boundaries do I have that need to be respected?*
- *What personal experiences do I bring to conflict? (These can be positive or negative experiences.) What are other perspectives or experiences I could consider?*

Know what you want to accomplish.

To determine which peacemaking approach you use, you need to know what you want to accomplish. Goals differ depending on the situation. Not all conflicts are equal, and we shouldn't feel required to bring the same energy and attention to them. Nor are they all going to be solved using the same tools.

- *What are your goals? What situations can you think of in which these different goals would be the best choice?*
 - *Diffuse tension and violence*
 - *Live with or alongside someone with different values or capacities*
 - *Persuade an individual or a group*
 - *Solve a problem (personal or shared)*
 - *Create something new*

Know how to act as a peacemaker.

In addition to knowing yourself and knowing what you want to accomplish, it's important to learn **how** to act as a peacemaker. There are people who spend months, years, and decades learning these skills. This presentation is simply an introduction.



SECTION V

Scenarios to Practice

Scenario 1: How to diffuse conflict in a low-stakes setting.

You are interacting with a person you are loosely connected to, perhaps in a retail store or at a community event. How can you allow the person to feel heard, leave them with an opportunity for self-reflection, and reinforce that the person matters in spite of your disagreement? This will model how to love someone while still not affirming their position.

ASK "Tell me more about this..."
 "What led you to this belief?"
 "Is there any information that might lead you to change your mind?"

REPEAT Summarize their statements to demonstrate that you understand.

PIVOT "We both feel strongly about this issue. Let's find some other way to connect."

*This doesn't resolve anything, but **does it add more peace to the world?***

Scenario 2: When your goal is to live alongside someone with different values or capacity.

This is a way to approach someone you love and care about, but you are having conflict about a position or idea. The idea here isn't to convince anyone but rather to maintain the relationship.

LISTEN Listen to understand and withhold judgment.
Demonstrate physical openness, perhaps by making eye contact.
Engage in active listening by summarizing to show that you understand: "So, you're saying that..."

ASK Ask questions to unearth values.
"Tell me more..."
"How does this affect you or your loved ones?"
Listen silently.

SHARE Share a personal story; connect and be vulnerable.
Articulate shared values.

ASK Invite your partner to do the same.

*Have you found common ground? **How can this approach create peace?***

Scenario 3: Imagine a difficult conversation you have had in the past.

Share the situation with a partner.

- What is a phrase that stops the conversation?
- What is a value you shared with the person you were in conflict with?
- Is there anything you would have handled differently if given the chance?
- Were you able to come away from the experience with a greater understanding about the other person or their position?

Ultimately, personal peace as well as societal peace comes from the Prince of Peace. As His followers, we can do much to share His light and His peace with others. We can be instrumental in creating a peaceful society. As we follow Christ, we can learn to be peacemakers.

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

In a 2017 Deseret News opinion piece titled "To be a peacemaker is to be a creator, a visionary, and a champion," Eva Witesman wrote: "There are two ways to interpret the concept of 'making peace.' The first is to avoid conflict; to acquiesce. As in, 'I have made peace with the fact that we disagree.' Or 'I have made peace with the way things are.' After this manner, peace is maintained by keeping quiet, by biting one's tongue, by falling in line. By going gently into that good night.

"This is not the kind of peace I want to make.

"When I make peace, I want to build it. From the ground up if I have to. Like a first responder who runs toward the flames, or a soldier who runs toward the good fight, I believe a peacemaker is the sort of person who runs toward conflict and builds peace with her words and her own two hands.

"To be a peacemaker is to be a creator, a visionary, a champion. Peacemaking is not for the faint of heart."



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