

The Conflict-Avoidant Couple



with Dr. Ellyn Bader

*The Couples Institute &
The Developmental Model of Couples Therapy*

Why is it so hard to get and maintain a clear sense of direction with a high Conflict-Avoidant Couple?

1.

It takes emotional risk and self-accountability to set clear targets for change

I don't know. I don't care.

2

Vagueness and passivity are prevalent
These work against connection

A Clear Direction is Lacking

3.

Goals are often behavioral without a clear sense of what to do to achieve them.

Motivation is Missing

4

What do you want?

Why do you want it?

What is your individual role to help bring it about?

Is therapist bored or frustrated?

5.

Be willing to be tough on tackling intolerance of any tension, or the belief that a partner has “no right to feel that way,” or is just plain wrong

It is classic in terms of conflict avoidant patterns of interaction that one person has very little tolerance for any type of raised voice or energy, or even a calm but strongly differentiated statement, coming from the other person. Their partner or you! Backing the session up you can explain,

“This is a very common pattern in couples and because there is such a high level of sensitivity to tension you are not able to go deeply enough into issues to solve them. Part of what changing the process of talking to each other means is being able to tolerate the tension that comes from exploring something more deeply than you let yourselves do at this point in time.”

Often people express disappointment or hopelessness, and it’s a great opportunity to say: “Yes if we decide that we are willing to get to know our partners on a deeper, more intimate level, that means there are going to be plenty of times where we hear things we don’t want to hear – and that’s a choice – we can keep a relationship very superficial, where you don’t let yourself know much about the person you’re married to, or, if you are really willing to have a more intimate knowledge of each other, it’s going to mean that you hear things you don’t want to hear, and when this happens is exactly when you need to be able to take a deep breath, calm yourself, become curious and not take it personally.