

# Discussion questions with your mentor

**1) What do you think of Nicky's definition of conflict?**

*I want you to think what I think, and/or I want you to do what I think you should do... and it matters to me what you think or do.*

**2) What experiences have you had of conflict in the church?**

**3) Read Ephesians 4:1 – 5: 2 and Matthew 18:15 – 17. What do these passages help you think about being Godly when in conflict? What do other passages of the Bible add?**

**4) Think of a time when you or your husband have been in conflict, in church or another context. Do you tend to triangle? Who do you triangle with? How do you handle yourself in these conversations? Are the conversations helpful or unhelpful?**

**5) Is there a conflict you are currently in or the potential of a conflict that is brewing? Can you use 'Nicky's hot tips' to work through that so you are not amplifying the conflict but instead seeking to understand the others, growing in wisdom and godliness in your response?**

**6) How do you support your husband in a loving, godly, wise way that doesn't amplify the anxiety but encourages thoughtfulness and godliness?**

**GET THOUGHTFUL, GET PRAYERFUL AND WORK AT GODLINESS**

**KEEP THE GOSPEL GOAL OF PEACE, RECONCILIATION AND UNITY IN MIND.**

This does not mean that the goal is not to have conflict – instead, your goal is to work through it in a way that honours our Lord.

# START IN GOD'S WORD

***What do you see in Ephesians 4:1 – 5:2 and Matthew 18:15-17***

*Be humble*

*Be gentle,*

*Be patient,*

*Bear with one another in love (Eph 4:2)*

*Work at unity (Eph 4:3)*

*Speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15,25)*

*Watch your thinking (Eph 4:17,23)*

*Be intentional (Eph 4:24)*

*Don't be tempted to lie (Eph 4:25)*

*Be particularly careful when you are angry (Eph 4:26)*

*Watch, name and manage your emotions (Eph 4:26, 31)*

*Think about what you say and how you say it (Eph 4:29)*

*Be kind and compassionate (Eph 4:32)*

*Be willing to forgive (Eph 4:32)*

*Remember your sin before a holy God (Eph 4:32)*

*Walk in the way of love, as Jesus did (Eph 5:1)*

*Call out sin (Matt 18:15)*

*Speak to the person directly (Matt 18:15)*

*Escalate as required (Matt 18:16-17)*

# NICKY'S TIPS ABOUT TRIANGLES

1. Consider 'where does the conflict belong' and deal with it there.
2. Consider who you speak to (keep triangles to a minimum).
3. Consider how you speak (Don't take sides. Attempt to be neutral, curious but warm).
4. Assume most people will share what you share. (Triangles are a very effective way to diffuse anxiety. As you feel the desire to share with someone to diffuse your anxiety, they too will feel the desire to share with someone else to diffuse their anxiety).

*"The basic building block of any emotional system is the 'Triangle.' When emotional tension in a two-person system exceeds a certain level, it 'triangles' a third person, permitting the tension to shift about within the triangle".*

*Murray Bowen*

## NICKY'S 15 HOT TIPS

1. **Turn your attention to yourself.** What is going on in your body and mind?
2. **Pray.** Ask for God's help and wisdom. Share your concerns, struggles and emotions. Ask for clarity and a desire for peace, reconciliation and unity.
3. **Get clear on your principles.** What is important? What is your end goal? How do you want to relate to people? What are you willing to change? What are you unwilling to change?
4. **Assume people aren't out to 'get' you.** Even though it may feel like it, work on gracious favour in your relationship. Behind every person is a life story that is influencing their sensitivity to the issue of the day. You may never know what, but you can know they are feeling threatened and generally more interested in their personal comfort and settling their emotions. (There are rare situations where people are feeling so distressed and have formed a belief that you are (or, more likely, your husband is) the sole source of their distress. If you think this is you → point 15 (psychologist or pastoral supervisor) is essential, as is contacting your bishop.
5. **Get out of the washing machine!** By this, I mean notice if you are overwhelmed by emotions. If you feel like you are IN a front-loader washing machine, you are not in a reflective space. Try to get thoughtful and move to a space where you can watch what is going on – as if you are outside a front-loader washing machine.
6. **Speak face to face if possible.** Texts, emails, letters, and social media generally escalate emotion.

7. **'Seek first to understand, then be understood'** (Steven Covey). When you engage with people, think about all the questions you can ask to ensure you understand them, their concerns, their perspectives, etc. Reflect back to them what you hear them say so they know you understand, and also, they can correct you if you have misunderstood. After that, ask permission to share your perspective.
8. **Be aware of displaced emotion.** This can be for you or the other person. If your mother is dying and you are distressed, the way you react in conflict will likely be more reactive than when you do not have other concerns on your plate. Similarly, if the person you are in conflict with seems weirdly or inexplicably upset, be curious as to what else is going on for them and self-aware as to what is going on for you.
9. **Lean in.** When there is a conflict going on, we usually get anxious. It is a natural response for most of us to distance ourselves, e.g. avert our eyes, cross the street, or pretend we haven't seen someone. Instead, seek the opposite. Make eye contact and smile, ask about the dog or their children, etc. Balancing difficult contact with neutral or warm contact can be helpful (assuming it comes from a genuine place).
10. **Be quick to apologise.** If you have done anything wrong, misunderstood, or become aggressive, - be quick to apologise. It is disarming, it is humble, it is godly. It needs to be sincere. Start the sentence with 'I want to apologise for.... That was wrong (or some other word that describes your sin or lack of love)'.
11. **Empathise.** Use reflective statements like "I see you feel strongly about this" or "This must be hard for you".
12. **Stick to facts.** Discuss 'who, what & when' rather than 'why'. Humans generally validate their actions with a narrative that justifies them – to themselves or others. Rather than 'Why did you do that?' ask, 'What were you thinking when you did that'?
13. **Be future-focussed.** Remember – the long-term goal is to understand each other, resolve what can be fixed, accept differences of opinion and have a loving relationship.  
There might be questions you can ask 'what would you like from me?', 'Is there something I could do differently?'; what would you like the outcome to be?'. Again, go back to point 3. Get clear on your principles. You don't have to agree with their desires.
14. **Preplan difficult chats.** Think about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Practice it out loud. It's okay to take a piece of paper or notes on your phone. Confess you think this is important, have thought about it beforehand, and you want to be able to remember what you want to say and be clear in how you say it.
15. **Get appropriate support.** Consider how consuming this is for you (or your husband). If you are getting tunnel visions, heart palpitations or losing sleep – you would be wise to see a psychologist or pastoral supervisor. The diocese will pay for six sessions with a psychologist under the Clergy Assistance Program (details below). The fallout from conflict can take a massive toll on you, your family and your church. Getting help managing a complex scenario can help you come out the other side less battle-scarred.

# Clergy Assistance Program

Professional, confidential Christian counselling  
to meet the needs of clergy.



Life-changing care

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The counselling provided under the Clergy Assistance Program is funded by the Diocese for clergy licensed to a Sydney Anglican parish. Access to this service is completely confidential – the Diocese does not receive information about clergy who access the Program.

More Information

[www.anglicare.org.au/clergy-assistance-program](http://www.anglicare.org.au/clergy-assistance-program)

Contact

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*Lives changing and communities growing by care through Jesus Christ*

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# SYSTEMS IN MINISTRY

**Would you like help navigating challenging relationships and growing in emotional maturity?**

At Systems In Ministry we understand the challenges of ministry, that tension in relationships can absorb a lot of energy, and that it's hard to navigate these pressures with maturity and wisdom. Family systems theory can be a helpful resource for growing your emotional maturity amidst these challenges and help you toward a more fruitful and sustainable ministry.

**STEP BACK** From the intensity of ministry life

**SEE** Your relationship challenges more clearly

**THINK** About new ways forward

**GROW** Your emotional maturity



**Online learning modules  
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*"The study and application of family systems theory has, in God's providence, been an incalculable blessing to my personal life and my ministry as a Christian leader. God has used it to increase my self-awareness, to grow my curiosity about how systems and communities work, and to train me in the practice of contagious calm." (Archdeacon Simon Flinders)*

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