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Mindful Conflict Resilience, Not Reactivity

As I write this, I realize just how much I need to talk about the uncomfortable word.... conflict! Whether it be with my family or working relationships, I must say, I either avoid it or do the complete opposite by overreacting. Tell me I am not alone!

Thankfully, K-State Research and Extension discussed this topic during our new agent training. However, I realized I put that this information ‘on a shelf’ without necessarily practicing it. That is, until I heard our speaker recently during a webinar, Dr. Hunter Stanfield from the Family Studies and Human Service Department at Kansas State University.

It is not uncommon that conflict can create considerable anxiety and dread for everyone, but it is not something that most any of us want to actually to deal with until maybe it is too late. Dr. Stanfield sheds some light on this and says it doesn’t have to be like that. The ability to manage conflict well is not something you were born with or without. Instead, it is a set of skills that can be learned or muscles that can be developed.

Here are some things you can practice to build your sense of confidence, well-being, and acceptance of challenging situations.

1. **Always pause** — When a conflict arises, avoid lashing out. Take a moment to breathe slowly and become calm. Attempting to engage with someone when you are reactive can make things worse.

2. **Allow yourself to feel what you're feeling** — Emotions are indicators that something is going on. They help us recognize what may be happening in us and in others.
Ask yourself these questions:
 - a. What is the emotion/feeling that's coming up for me?
 - b. What was it that someone did, or the situation that I am in, that may have brought up this emotion/feeling?
 - c. Why is this important to me?
3. **Acknowledge that you have space to choose** — Recognize that the person you have the most ownership over is you. Dr. Stanfield shares that taking as much responsibility as we truthfully can for our actions, whether we believe them to be small or insignificant, allows us to recognize that we play a part in the how a conflict is resolved or exacerbated.
4. **Challenge your assumptions** — Attempt to understand before attempting to be understood. Be open-minded to the views of others involved in the conflict. Remember, there's always one more fact in every person's story that we know nothing about that could explain why they may be doing what they are. Challenge yourself to ask open-ended questions so that you can truly understand their perspective.
5. **Move forward** — Stick to the point of the conflict and brainstorm ways to resolve it. Agree to try a resolution without resentment. And when you move forward with a suggestion, give it your full effort.

I know this is a lot to take in and handling conflict differently starts with you and I. What is one thing you could start, stop, and continue when it comes to better handling difficult situations, people, and yourself? I will be trying one this week!

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