

**STUDENT HANDOUT**  
**Problem-Solving Exercise: Resolving Conflicts**

**DIRECTIONS:** Consider the following problem/dilemma:

*Carol and Jason, both in their early 30s, have been living together for less than a year. They have a lot in common and enjoy each other's company – going to hockey games and movies together, skiing in the mountains in the winter, and hiking in the summer. They share responsibilities around the apartment and each contributes equally to the costs.*

*A conflict has arisen, however, that is causing considerable strife in their relationship. Jason has a small group of buddies that he has socialized with since high school. Carol has made it clear that she does not want to socialize with these friends (all guys). She refers to them as “losers” and “adolescents.” Jason is devoted to his friends and enjoys the crazy and comfortable camaraderie he experiences when he is with them.*

*Both Carol and Jason had thought that their relationship had potential to blossom into a long-term commitment, even marriage. This conflict is causing them both to reconsider.*

A. Define the Conflict

- Facts:
  - What is the relevant information here? How might Carol get more information on the rewards that Jason gets from these friends? How can Jason discover exactly what Carol doesn't like about these friends?
- Feelings:
  - How might Carol feel when Jason goes out with his buddies?
  - How might Jason feel when Carol refuses to spend time with his buddies?
- Negative outcome:
  - How might this relationship deteriorate if Jason continues to spend time with his buddies?
  - How might the relationship deteriorate if Carol continues to comment negatively about these friends?
- Positive benefits:
  - What opportunities might be gained if Jason continues to see these friends without Carol?
  - What is the best thing that could happen?

Is there further information you need to adequately understand this problem? If so, what is it and where would you get this information?

B. Examine Possible Solutions

Based on your discussion, consider as many possible solutions as you can to this conflict. Try to think of obvious and not-so-obvious alternatives. For each one, consider the positive and negative outcomes – for both Carol and Jason.

OPTIONS	POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

C. Based on your analysis, what is the best choice for Carol and Jason at this time? Some questions to consider: Is this a win-win solution (i.e., do both partners gain) or, alternately, are the losses shared? Is the solution worth the costs to each person and/or to their relationship? Are the costs and rewards evenly distributed between both partners? Might other solutions be more effective?

D. Evaluate the Solution

What questions would you want to ask to find out if the solution was, in fact, successful?

E. Self-reflection: Was this a new way for you to come to a decision in a conflict situation? How did it feel to you? What did you learn from the process?