



# CANDID CONVERSATIONS: COUPLES, MONEY, AND CONFLICT

---

Techniques for defusing tension in the financial planning process



# Table of contents

- 3 Introduction**
- 4** • Toward a Healthy Money Mindset
- 5** • Advisor Benefits from Financial Psychology
- 6 Part 1: Conflict Triage**
  - The Conversation's Getting Heated – Now What?
- 9 Further Reading: Getting to Yes**
- 10 Role Play Scenario: Untangling Savings Priorities**
- 11 Part 2: Preparing Your Practice for Successful Conflict Resolution**
  - Set Up for a Smooth Journey
  - Showcase Your Referral Network
- 12** • Explore Values at Onboarding and Beyond
  - Be Sensitive to Power Imbalances
- 13** • Promote Connection
  - Normalize Financial Arguments
- 14** • Encourage Collaboration, Not Compromise
- 15 Role Play Scenario: Clash Over the Bank of Mom and Dad**
- 16 Your Skills Checklist**



# Let's get candid about planning and conflict

Dealing with conflict between a couple is a part of the job that few financial planners speak about or are trained to handle, but all should come to expect.

In fact, the CFP Board's addition of the Psychology of Financial Planning and its related subtopics—including Sources of Money Conflict and Mediating Financial Conflict—to its certification curriculum spotlights the evolution of the industry, the role of the financial planner, and client expectations.

The good news is that conflict can often be a catalyst for progress and change.<sup>1</sup> That's because in order for a couple to fix a money conflict, they need to bring it out into the open and effectively work through it.

The results can be surprising. When approached constructively, a money conflict can even become an opportunity for a planner to learn more about their clients' values and strengthen both the couple's relationship and the client-planner relationship.

In this guide, we've gathered best practices and ideas from experts in financial therapy as well as experienced advisors. They explain how they handle conflict with care to build deeper connections with clients and help them navigate what's standing in the way of achieving their goals.



**EMILY KOOCHEL, PH.D., AFC<sup>®</sup>, CFT-I<sup>™</sup>, BFA<sup>™</sup>**  
MANAGER, FINANCIAL WELLNESS,  
EMONEY ADVISOR

***“Financial planners are in a unique position to help couples express what matters to them and mediate when there are conflicting priorities. Planners can help couples lead their own financial journeys.”***

## Why advance your skills in conflict management?

### FOR THE HEALTH OF YOUR PRACTICE

**41%**

of investors say a “willingness to discuss difficult topics or life events with me and work through them” is a crucial part of financial planning.<sup>2</sup> If you’re unwilling, you risk being left behind.

**30%**

of those ages 30 to 45 describe their ideal advisor as a life coach.<sup>3</sup>

**The number of advisors applying financial psychology in client engagements will increase,** Cerulli researchers say, led by those who have studied the CFP Board’s new curriculum.<sup>4</sup>

### FOR YOUR CLIENTS’ FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

**1 in 5**

couples say money is their biggest relationship challenge.<sup>5</sup>

**41%**

of divorced Gen Xers and 29 percent of Baby Boomers said their marriages ended because of conflicts over money.<sup>6</sup>

**The divorce rate for those 50 and older has nearly doubled since 1990,** and so-called “gray divorce” can be financially devastating.<sup>7</sup>



## Toward a Healthy Money Mindset

**Over 80 percent of advisors agree that applying financial psychology benefits the planning process by:**

- Increasing the ability to provide personalized service
- Increasing client engagement with the plan
- Increasing client satisfaction
- Reducing client anxiety

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Suzanne R., and Raeann R. Hamon. 2012. Exploring Family Theories (third ed.). New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> eMoney Consumer Research Study, April 2022.

<sup>3</sup> AIG and MIT AgeLab, “Future of Client-Advisor Relationships,” 2020.

<sup>4</sup> The Cerulli Report, “U.S. Retail Investor Advice Relationships,” 2022.

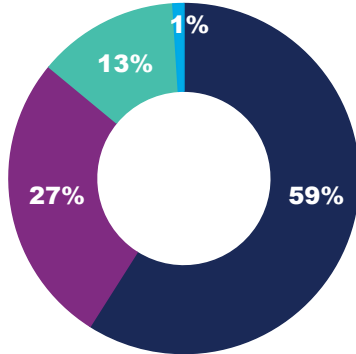
<sup>5</sup> Fidelity Investments, “2021 Couples & Money Study,” July 2021.

<sup>6</sup> MarketWatch, “Gray Divorce Can Be Financially Devastating,” August 9, 2022.18, 2022.

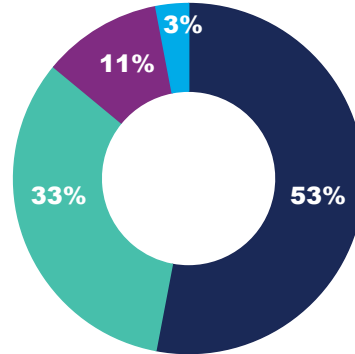
<sup>7</sup> MassMutual, “Divorce after 50: Planning for the financial impact,” Aug. 18, 2022.

## Advisor Benefits from Financial Psychology

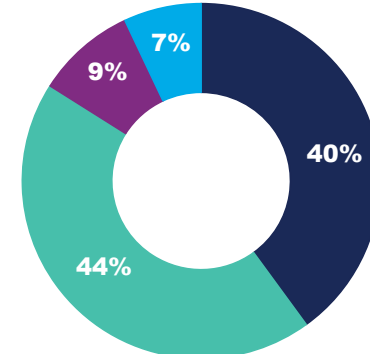
Increases client retention



Helps facilitate new client acquisition



Increases profitability



■ Disagree   
 ■ Neither Agree Nor Disagree   
 ■ Agree   
 ■ Strongly Agree

Source: eMoney Evolution of Advice Research, July 2022, Advisors n=300

### What this eBook is ...



A choose-your-own-adventure style resource



Evidence-based tactics that can improve client conversations



A guide on conflict management with examples and dialog

### ... and what it isn't.



A how-to on becoming an armchair therapist



A psychology textbook



A guide to creating a financial plan

## PART 1

# Conflict Triage

### The Conversation's Getting Heated – Now What?

Conflict between couples can take many forms. Whether it's one partner's financial infidelity coming to light, retirees at odds over financial support of a family member ([see scenario 2](#)), or parents arguing over whether to prioritize saving for education or retirement ([see scenario 1](#)), you can follow these steps to get things back on an even keel.

#### 1. CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF TO ENSURE CALM

Hit the mental pause button for a moment if you can, just to ensure you don't enter a "fight, flight, or freeze" response—this is our body's physiological response to stress. If you're familiar with Daniel Kahneman's work, the point of the pause is to ensure you're on "rational" system 2 rather than "emotional" system 1.

A short string of words to reassure yourself ("the conflict is theirs, not mine") can also help reinforce feelings of calm.

#### Time to Activate "System 2"

**System 1:** Intuition and instinct (unconscious, fast, autopilot)

**System 2:** Rational thinking (takes effort, slow, logical)

Source: "Thinking, Fast and Slow," Daniel Kahneman, 2013.



**SASHA GRABENSTETTER, AFC®, BFA™**  
FINANCIAL PLANNING EDUCATION  
CONSULTANT, EMONEY ADVISOR

*"You don't have to be a therapist to recognize stress in a client meeting. The expectation is not to resolve all conflict, but to identify when it's interfering with the planning process and communicate with clients about finding a resolution."*

## 2. CHOOSE YOUR TONE AND PACE

Former FBI hostage negotiator Chris Voss favors what he calls the “late-night FM DJ voice”—lowering your voice register and slowing down what you’re saying. Simply by using your voice, you can help your clients feel more comfortable. Check out a clip of Voss’ MasterClass [here](#) to hear him explain how to master tone and inflection.

## 3. MAKE A VERBAL OBSERVATION

Neuroscience studies involving enhanced brain imaging have shown that labeling an emotion can lessen its hold on someone’s brain. A phrase like, “John, you sound angry,” seems so simple, but we have the studies to show that this tiny acknowledgement has outsize effects on the brain.

Dr. Daniel Siegel, founding co-director of the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA, calls this “name it to tame it.” By accepting our emotions, we allow room for their intense heat to dissipate.

## 4. OFFER CHOICES

Your clients may not be ready to talk about the conflict at hand (for example, they might be experiencing what the Gottman Institute calls “emotional flooding”), so it’s best to offer alternatives. After you observe the emotions present, offer a choice on how to proceed: “Jane, you seem upset. John, from your crossed arms it looks like you’re angry. Would you like to take a moment to talk about it? If not, we can move on to the next topic.”

### Signs of Emotional Flooding

Emotional flooding is “a sensation of feeling psychologically and physically overwhelmed during conflict, making it virtually impossible to have a productive, problem-solving conversation.”

Take note if you sense any of these:

- Pulse Racing
- Shallow breathing
- Jaw tightening

Source: Gottman Institute

## 5. REMAIN NEUTRAL

Above all, it’s important not to appear to take the side of one client over the other. Part of that includes using questions to draw out the quieter partner to ensure they have an opportunity to tell their story. Be sensitive to the power imbalances that are present in many relationships.

Research has shown that one of the most potent meanings of money is power or control. In fact, perceptions of unfairness or inequality and decision-making power have been reported as common issues for partners, causing financial conflict, damaging trust, and putting couples at greater risk for relationship dissolution.



## 6. PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING

How exactly can listening be an “active” activity? Active listening, as defined by psychologists Carl Rogers and Richard Farson, requires a specific set of skills you can learn.



### Taking notes

Any details related to your client’s financial goals or concerns should be written down as a best practice.



### Asking open-ended questions

Closed questions set you up for an answer that’s a single word, usually “yes” or “no.” Open-ended questions require an explanation of a person’s knowledge or feelings and can lead to deeper discussion. Try something like, “When Jane proposed that you stop paying for your son’s bills, how did that make you feel?”



### Asking for clarification

If you read the room and the partner who isn’t talking looks puzzled, a simple “What did you mean when you said \_\_\_?” directed toward the speaker can help get everyone on the same page.



### Allowing time for client self-reflection

Something as simple as taking a sip of water (and maybe silently counting to 10 in your head) can give clients the time and space needed to express themselves.



### Reflecting and paraphrasing back with change talk

“Change talk” is any language that has momentum toward a particular goal or change in their behavior. A phrase like “I need to stop spending so much on frivolous items” is one example. You can reflect this back to the client: “It sounds like curbing your spending is now becoming a priority for you.”



### Inviting them to share more

“Tell me more” or “go on” can be the key that unlocks what’s at the heart of the matter. Encouraging the client to clarify and add details can help you be more responsive to their needs.



### Using restraint (don’t ask too many questions)

The last thing you want is for your client meeting to turn into an interrogation.





## FURTHER READING:

# Getting to Yes

Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton of the Harvard Negotiation Project have had success with an approach to reaching a win-win solution. It consists of these four main principles:

### 1. SEPARATE THE PEOPLE FROM THE PROBLEM

You might sometimes perceive a rejection of your position as a personal slight. That's why it's important to define and attack the problem to be solved, instead of each other.

**Example:** One of your clients wants to use her husband's bonus to buy a lake house. The husband objects to the purchase. Using this principle, you could sort out the strong emotions at the heart of the dispute through active listening. This will help each partner understand the other's concerns. It turns out that one partner has anxiety about spending, and the other is feeling deprived of quality time with family.

### 2. FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS

At this point, you want to focus on why the client wants something (interests), not the thing itself (positions). The goal is defined, but the way you get to it should be flexible and can be adapted to the other person's needs.

**Example:** The desire to create more family togetherness is an interest. Buying a lake house is a position—one way of furthering that interest. You encourage the wife to set aside the position for now to find a new way of furthering her interest in family time.

### 3. GENERATE OPTIONS FOR MUTUAL GAIN

The odds of making a good decision increase as you create more pathways to your goal.

**Example:** Encourage the clients at odds over buying a lake house to instead think of alternative ways to further the interest in more family togetherness. The options must also respect the husband's need to keep ongoing expenses at a certain level.

### 4. ESTABLISH OBJECTIVE CRITERIA

As you settle on an outcome, make sure it's fair, reasonable, and respects both partners' interests. You add value at this stage as a neutral third party who can objectively evaluate the options in collaboration with the clients.

**Example:** The husband and wife list several options for using some bonus money to promote family togetherness, including taking a big trip they both had on their "bucket list." Both partners agreed the trip would be a great use of the money.

## The 4 Fundamentals of Principled Negotiations



### PEOPLE

Separate people from problems



### INTERESTS

Focus on interests, not positions



### OPTIONS

Generate options for mutual gain



### CRITERIA

Use objective criteria



## ROLE PLAY SCENARIO:

# Untangling Savings Priorities

**Advisor:** Great to see you both again. We had such great conversation last time. I'd like to try to tackle retirement and education planning today. Do you have any initial thoughts?

**Sam:** My initial thought is that we completely disagree about how to approach saving for retirement. All she ever cares about is the kids and she's obsessed with trying to fund each of their college educations. Meanwhile, I would like to save for retirement instead so we can travel across Europe in our golden years like we've always dreamed of. She always says it's too far away to care about—it's so frustrating!

**Ana:** Look, it's not the only thing I care about. I want to spend time traveling with you as well, but retirement, it just feels so far away. To me, it's more important to focus on today. Right now, we can help our kids, and we'll talk about retirement when we're older.

**Advisor:** It sounds like some strong emotions are coming up for you both for two topics that are crucial for your financial plan. Would you like to talk it out, or move ahead to another topic?

**Sam:** We may as well discuss this. Maybe you can offer us a fresh perspective. Basically, I hear you Ana, and I want you to know that I also care about our children's future. However, I watched my parents work until the day they died, having never experienced the fun stuff they dreamed about. The kids can borrow for their education, but that's not the case with retirement. I don't want to work forever.

**Advisor:** So, what I'm hearing is that there is anxiety about not having enough to be able to slow down when you're ready, Sam. I also sense there's more to the story around the education funding—Ana, can you tell us more about that?

**Ana:** Well, you see, my family wasn't able to support me financially while I was going to college, and I just felt an immense amount of pressure. It was hard to focus on schoolwork while working multiple side jobs. If I can take that burden off my children, that's really important to me. Like her I also want to retire, but it's really crucial to me that our children don't feel that pressure.

**Advisor:** Thanks for sharing that. I feel like we're getting closer to finding a way to make a win-win situation. I can empathize with both of you and the level of anxiety for your family. I think we could try splitting your savings into buckets, one for retirement to help build Sam's confidence, one for education to help Ana sleep at night, and one for your relationship now and in retirement, to make sure you have enough travel funding to really connect on a regular basis. Let me show you what that would look like in our planning platform.

**Sam:** Yeah, I like that solution. We could focus on one bucket for a while and then sort of understand when that's done and then switch to the other.

**Ana:** You're right, it doesn't have to be "all or nothing." I like this bucket approach.

**Advisor:** Great. I'm glad you were both able to speak to your financial concerns and hear each other out, so you can take care of each other and collaborate in funding your shared goals.

## Scenario analysis

### What went well:

- The advisor made empathetic observations that moved the conversation forward ("It sounds like some strong emotions are coming up for you ...").
- The advisor used open-ended questions, and drew out the less verbal partner
- They used reflective listening, summarizing the couple's statements ("What I'm hearing is that there is a little bit of anxiety ...")
- They illustrated their solution to the issue through planning technology, creating clarity.

### What needs improvement:

- The advisor seemed blindsided by the argument. Carrying out a values exercise on a regular basis can proactively open up communication on what's important to each partner.

## PART 2

# Preparing Your Practice for a Successful Conflict Resolution

## Set Up for a Smooth Journey

Couples will continue to have disagreements over money. But that doesn't mean there's nothing you can do about client conflict. Many financial planners say a well-developed referral network, an in-depth discovery process, and a strong focus on connection and balance are vital preparation that keep conflict from catching them off-guard. We've gathered some of their strategies for you to dig into.

## Showcase Your Referral Network

You've probably heard of advisors who assemble a "dream team" of a CPA, estate attorney, and a mortgage broker to work together as a comprehensive team to serve clients. Others create a local business directory of sorts, with trusted professionals of all types for clients to call on when needed.

Whether you call it a team, directory, or referral list, you should ensure it includes a therapist who can accept new patients. This may be especially crucial for younger clients.

A 2023 Fidelity research study on Gen Z and Millennial investors showed an openness to referrals from an advisor: 14 percent of these younger clients were given a recommendation of a relationship counselor, and 11 percent for a mental health specialist. Clients age 58 and up didn't report these types of referrals.

When selecting a trusted mental health professional to refer to, consider the CFP Board's best practices on recommending a service provider:

"A CFP® professional must, in relevant part, have a reasonable basis for the recommendation based on the person's reputation, experience, and qualifications."

The organization considers personal experience with a professional as well as research on reputation, experience, and qualifications to be a "reasonable basis."



## What is a Financial Therapist?

Financial therapy brings together behavioral therapy and financial coaching to help address and improve thoughts, feelings, and behaviors around money. Financial therapists complete an exam designed to cover fundamental financial planning, financial therapy/counseling, and therapeutic competencies.

Find a financial therapist in your area through the [Financial Therapy Association directory](#).

According to the CFP Board, a financial planner must communicate their scope of respective services and make reasonable referrals when deemed necessary. So just as financial planner would not prepare estate documents, and refer to an attorney, a financial planner should not practice financial therapy without the proper education and licensing.

## Explore Values at Onboarding and Beyond

Because values are the foundation for many goals in life, exploring them early in a planning relationship can be impactful. Getting each individual's values written down also becomes an important touchstone if there are choppy waters in a relationship later on.

There are many forms of values exercises, from a simple list of questions to card decks to digital experiences. Here are three to explore to see if they're right for your clientele:

- Think2Perform, a leadership consulting firm, offers a free online values card exercise: [think2perform.com/values#start](https://think2perform.com/values#start)
- The book "Facilitating Financial Health" (Klontz, Kahler, and Klontz) includes a Life Aspirations Exercise you can use with clients: [bradklontz.com/books](https://bradklontz.com/books)
- George Kinder's Life Planning questions ([kinderinstitute.com/books](https://kinderinstitute.com/books)), which ask clients to contemplate their own mortality to sharpen the focus on what matters to them.

## Be Sensitive to Power Imbalances

It's rare to find a household where both partners are on even footing when it comes to financial knowledge and earn the same amount of money. When one partner earns more or knows more about the household finances, you can find practical ways to prevent that fact from being a stumbling block to their financial planning. Here are a few ideas:

- **Try to hold meetings on neutral ground.** Avoid arranging to meet at the office of the breadwinner partner as this can stir feelings of disempowerment for the other partner.
- **Pause when either partner seems confused about a concept or strategy.** Without singling anyone out, use metaphors and plain language to clarify what you're talking about, and ask for feedback on your explanation.
- **Use financial planning software to create a shared vision of the future.** The adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" applies here.
- **Get both sides to the story.** If one partner is doing all the talking and one is silent, check in with them to make sure they feel heard.

## Tech Tip:

### Use a client portal to streamline and deepen engagement.

A financial planning tool that features a client portal with aggregation can be a competitive advantage. Clients today are more willing to do the legwork of sharing outside account data with an advisor if it means they'll have a clearer view of the big picture of their finances. In turn, with that aggregated view you have better insight to create a financial plan. With a client portal, you can also deepen client engagement.

*"We use the client portal heavily to get both spouses involved. For most couples there's a division of labor—one spouse will handle the investments and one spouse will handle paying the bills. We find it's really important to help both spouses understand the full picture."*

—Kelly DiGonzini, CFP®, MST  
Director of Financial Planning,  
Beacon Pointe Advisors

## Promote Connection

When couples feel connected, they're more likely to commit to their financial plan together. That's why you should encourage your clients to use their time and resources to nurture their connection to each other. In their bestselling book, *The Love Prescription*, leading marriage researchers John and Julie Gottman elevate the concept of declaring a regular date night. The Gottmans also recommend couples set aside time each week for what they call "the State of the Union Conversation." Knowing that you'll have these recurring moments when you'll have your partner's attention can reduce stress and conflict and helps set the conversation as a priority—one that has been planned for so you can mentally prepare for it.

### The Magic Ratio

**Stable marriages** have a **5:1 ratio** of positive interactions to negative ones.

**Unstable marriages** have a **0.8:1 ratio**.

Encourage clients to be intentional in using their resources to regularly create positive experiences

- Date nights or rituals of connection
- Vacations
- Celebrating important relationship milestones

Source: Gottman Institute

## Normalize Financial Arguments

Because every human being is different, with varied preferences and life experiences, conflict is an inevitable aspect of being in a relationship. While we should expect it, we shouldn't necessarily fear it. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, designed a study that showed disagreement can provide an opening for deeper intimacy and understanding between partners. It may be helpful to explain this to clients when they disagree.

**"We're going to fight about money. It's about as normal as it gets,"** says Meghaan Lurtz, Ph.D., FBS®, a leading financial planning researcher and a professor at Kansas State University. **"The focus can't be 'Don't fight.' The focus has to be 'Let's learn to fight better, so the fight actually ends, and we can repair and come back together.'"**



## Encourage Collaboration, Not Compromise

There are five main approaches to conflict management: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Each can be used appropriately in certain situations. However, when the matter is consequential and the goal is to resolve the conflict while keeping the relationship healthy, a collaborative approach is ideal.

Consider the scenario analyzed earlier in the guide. The partner who wants to save more for education and the other who wants to save more for retirement were allowed to express the underlying motivations behind what they wanted, leading to a win-win solution where both partners got what they ultimately wanted. If they had compromised—with perhaps the partner who valued education dedicating a percentage of their income to that purpose and that purpose only, and the partner who valued retirement doing the same—the chances of the conflict reoccurring increase and the benefits of working together as a team on finances will be lost.

That's where a financial planner can serve as a neutral third-party, leading clients toward a collaborative solution that optimizes their savings strategies for both goals.

### Sources

Archuleta, K. L. (2013). Couples, money, and expectations: Negotiating financial management roles to increase relationship satisfaction. *Marriage & Family Review*, 49(5), 391 – 411.  
 Dew, J., Britt, S., & Huston, S. (2012). Examining the relationship between financial issues and divorce. *Family Relations*, 61(4), 615-628.  
 The Harvard Negotiation Project

The Gottman Institute  
 CFP Board, Case Studies: Applying the Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct. September 2022.  
 Fidelity Investments. "It's Time to Change Your Mind about Young Investors." January 24, 2023.



## Tech Tip:

### Use collaborative, interactive financial planning tools.

A modern planning platform can get partners on the same page and making decisions together in real time. Offering clients personalized and on-demand financial experiences can deepen engagement.

*“I was meeting with a business owner and his spouse, a stay-at-home mother. She felt uneasy not knowing what was happening in the business, but she couldn’t put that into words until we showed everything on one screen. We worked through that together, providing transparency ... Using our planning platform, we helped this couple get on the same page.”*

—Taylor Kovar, CFP®  
 CEO and Founder, Kovar Wealth Management  
 CEO at The Money Couple

## ROLE PLAY SCENARIO:

# Clash Over the Bank of Mom and Dad

**Advisor:** Nice to see you again, Tom and Faith. Are you ready to dive into the details of your retirement planning today?

**Tom:** Yes, I'm hoping that having a plan in place will help keep things on an even keel at home.

**Faith:** What he means is that he's hoping you'll take his side on giving our grown daughter money, when he knows I want him to stop.

**Advisor:** It sounds like you two disagree about how best to help your daughter thrive. Would you like to take a few moments to discuss what's going on?

**Tom:** I ... I can't believe this. (Tom clenches his jaw, makes a fist, and seems unable to get any words out.)

**Advisor:** Why don't we take a moment and get some coffee before we begin.

[reconvening after a five-minute break]

**Advisor:** Thank you both for sharing what's been on your minds. We can explore the topic of financial support for your daughter, or we can move along to the next topic. What would you like to do?

**Tom:** We might as well talk about it. The issue is that I was raised with the idea that you take care of your child when they ask for your help, no matter their age. We can afford to give her the money, and it makes me sleep better at night knowing we provided for her.

**Advisor:** Provided for her? Tell me more about that.

**Faith:** She racked up debt on a credit card, and now we're paying the balance monthly. I just don't think she'll ever learn to live within her means if we always swoop in and rescue her.

**Advisor:** Faith, it sounds like you're worried this monetary support is enabling bad financial habits. Is that the case?

**Faith:** Exactly. How is she supposed to learn financial responsibility if we never give her a chance to?

**Advisor:** It seems like there are two things at play here. There's anxiety from Faith that the "open wallet policy" prevents your daughter from learning how to gain financial independence. And there's Tom's feeling that the support is vital for his own peace of mind. I feel like there may be more to the story there, Tom—can you tell us more?

**Tom:** It's just that as a young adult, I felt like I always had to solve my problems on my own. I struggled mightily. Got by on ramen noodles while starting my business, while my parents favored my little brother and paid his way through college. I never want my daughter to feel like she's all alone in the world.

**Advisor:** Thank you for sharing that. And of course, no good parent wants their child to feel alone. Going back to our values exercise Tom, I remember one of your core values is independence, and it's one you share with Faith. In light of that, how would you feel about exploring options to promote your daughter's financial independence?

**Tom:** Yes. I see what you're getting at. I'm open to exploring that.

**Advisor:** That's a great sign. I can share how others have approached it and then together you can decide what's best for your family. I also want to remind you of the referral list I shared with you at one of our first meetings; there are some great resources there including a family therapist.

## Scenario analysis

### What went well:

- The advisor was able to spot signs that Tom was emotionally flooded and needed a break.
- The advisor used open-ended questions and encouraging phrases. ("Tell us more.")
- They referred back to information gleaned from a values exercise to subtly point out that Tom's values and actions were misaligned.
- The advisor included a therapist on the referral list, making it easier for the client to act on the recommendation to talk to a counselor.

### What needs improvement:

- The advisor could have drawn out Faith's side of the story more.
- The advisor also could have used financial planning software to show how their spending might impact their overall plan.

# The secret to getting past a couple's money fight? Embrace it.

Being in the middle of client conflict can feel uncomfortable. But with the right mindset, knowledge, and resources, you can handle it with confidence.

Disagreement about money doesn't have to be negative—it's normal. Client conflict can create an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of the couple's relationship and those of the clients and planner.

Helping couples talk about money is ultimately about supporting them in fostering a closer connection with those they share a life with. When financial planners show this level of care, it inspires trusting and productive relationships.



## LEVEL UP YOUR KNOWLEDGE.

Read more on financial psychology topics on the eMoney Heart of Advice blog, keyword: Financial Psychology.

## Your skills checklist

Use this checklist as a reminder of how to handle conflict in client conversations:

- Check in with yourself to ensure claim
- Choose your tone and pace
- Make a verbal observation
- Offer choices
- Remain neutral
- Practice active listening

To learn how eMoney can help you provide couples with a more personalized planning experience, visit us at [emoneyadvisor.com](https://emoneyadvisor.com).