

## Brave Talk: Building Resilient Relationships in the Face of Conflict

**Melody Stanford Martin**

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*Brave Talk* is a transformative self-help book that's focused on conflict resolution.

In this polarized world, Melody Stanford Martin knows, conflict is everywhere. While discussions of how to proceed often revolve around compromise or trying to get someone to change, her work approaches conflict from the opposite direction, suggesting that its audience treat every conflict as an impasse. This counterintuitive approach puts relationships first, making space to see, learn, and understand each person. Allowing discomfort, Martin suggests, honors every person involved in a conflict, as well as their disparate ideas.

At first glance, this shift from conflict resolution to conflict transformation may seem like an issue of semantics, but the book's careful breakdown of ideas (and the stories that illustrate their impact) proves to be more powerful. Martin's work equips people to better understand others by first better understanding themselves—including their values, where their ideas come from, and what's at stake if they change.

Though it is hard hitting, the text is also full of humor. It includes a flow chart to determine whether what someone brings to the "potluck of ideas" is "food" or "poo," for example. And its other flow charts make decision making more concrete, breaking down complex ideas and ingraining new information for use on the go.

The book's framework is uniform in addressing hot-button conflicts around religion and politics, unraveling complicating factors of interpersonal dynamics, power disparities, and social media. It acknowledges that conflict can breed despair and takes the realistic view that most people and situations aren't likely to change. Still, its work is hopeful and empowering. Re-envisioning conflict with care, *Brave Talk* is a self-help book that flips the script to improve challenging situations.

MELISSA WUSKE (July / August 2020)

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