

Sunshine can bring conflicts, solutions



By Dave Brister

Psychologist
Community Mental Health Center

The welcome return of our sunshine after so long an absence this winter brings joy and op-

timism.

And this time of year we often experience a re-emerging eagerness to do many of the things we put off while gripped in our winter's deepest, darkest chill.

But very often, the things we want most to do affect the lives and plans of family and friends. Sometimes their goals and ours are incompatible: they get their way, or we get ours — but not both at the same time.

For example, if a family finds itself with a little extra time and money on hand, it might be used for a trip to one or to another — but rarely both.

Similarly, children can be taught and cared for in the way Mom prefers, or the way Dad wants it done, but rarely both

ways at the same time.

When the others in our lives seem determined to get what they want in ways likely to prevent us from achieving our own goals, we usually feel frustrated.

At these times we often angrily try to get our own way without the need of compromise: we get into a conflict with the other person, as each of us tries to achieve what she/he wants at the other's expense.

At these times "getting our own way" often seems more important than coming to really understanding the common problem so that we can develop an effective mutually acceptable solution.

During time of conflict — particularly involving those with whom we share a continuing relationship — it's important that we engage only in "constructive conflict." That is to say, we must somehow come to recognize that our disagreement arises from our sincere concern with the problem we share.

And if we really wish to resolve our conflict rather than simply perpetuate it, we must discuss our differing ideas in constructive ways that share information with the other, rather

than in destructive ways principally designed to persuade the other to accept our point of view.

We need to confine discussion of our disagreement to the issues at hand, and avoid bringing personalities into the conflict.

And finally, we must be openly supportive of the other person's ideas, and willing to consider the merits of her/his opinions and viewpoints that may differ markedly from our own — especially if we wish to cooperatively arrive at an agreement or solution much better than either of us could have developed alone.

If we manage to keep our conflicts constructive in these ways, we can expect to feel closer to the other person when our disagreement is all over and done with. This is because we will have gotten through some rough times together, developed trust in each other's ability to be fair and open-minded, developed solutions to problems that each can take pride in, and broadened our outlook on life.

Why not begin immediately to do something really constructive for your most important relationship? Today is the best of all possible times to begin.