

Climate and Conflict Program Transcript

[PHONE BUZZING]

SANDRA: Hi Bobby, I'm going to get straight to the point. We have to talk about Mom, and what we're going to do about her deteriorating health and abilities to take care of herself.

BOBBY: Come on Sis, right now? On the phone? Can't it wait until after her knee surgery next month?

SANDRA: It absolutely cannot wait until next month. You've been skirting this issue for weeks and we need to put a plan in place.

BOBBY: A plan? You always have to have a plan. What is so wrong with taking things one day at a time and making decisions as we go? Any plan we come up with is bound to change anyway.

SANDRA: Absolutely not, because when we do things that way, you always get out of having to help. I'm not going to let you get away with that this time.

BOBBY: Geez, Sandra. I don't get away with stuff, at least not on purpose.

SANDRA: I'm just telling it like I see it, so let's meet and talk about this one on one.

BOBBY: Fine I'm free tomorrow night.

SANDRA: Good. Come over for dinner if you like, and we can talk afterward.

BOBBY: You got it. I'll be there at 6:00 PM.

NARRATOR: Sandra's brother, Bobby, could get on her last nerve. He lived without anything tying him down, not a care in the world. The forever bachelor. But Sandra was determined to get him to take some responsibility this time. She knew he loved their mother very much, but taking care of her just didn't seem to fit his lifestyle and he seemed determined to keep things the same as usual. Sandra realized that she and her brother definitely had an interpersonal conflict here. But she knew that conflict could be helpful in a relationship and, if they work constructively, the outcome could be very good for their relationship and for their mother.

As she planned for their talk the next night, she knew it would be best to set a supportive communication climate for the discussion. She realized from her class readings this week that the way she talked on the phone might have put Bobby

on the defensive, which would not help in persuading him to take on a bigger role in caring for their mother. There were certainly a lot of relational dialectics and their brother sister relationship that she would need to address for this to be successful. Her brother was definitely autonomous and liked it when his life was new and unpredictable. This seemed to involve frequent parties and spur of the moment vacations, but Sandra liked predictability. The reality of her life almost demanded it and she believed that for her mother's care predictability was the best course of action.

Sandra decided that her best course of action was one where they neutralize the dialectical needs. In other words, they would negotiate a balance between their two sets of needs. She also wanted to make sure that as they talked she used confirming communication and did not disconfirm him because that could lead to defensiveness, as well. One way she could do this was by not having a set plan in place and expecting him to follow her ideas. If they came up with a plan together it might satisfy her need for strategy, but would give him the chance to add ideas through spontaneity. In the end, they needed to come up with a win-win situation for both of them.

The next night, Sandra decided to start the meeting off right by making Bobby his favorite meal.

[DOORBELL]

SANDRA: Can one of you kids get that? It's your uncle Bobby.

BOBBY: Hey, something smells good. Is that what I think it is?

SANDRA: Sure is. Ribs with mac and cheese, your favorites. And, a chocolate peanut butter pie for dessert.

BOBBY: Well that sounds great, but I have to say, I'm a little suspicious. Are you trying to butter me up?

SANDRA: Come on now, Bobby. I know that this is not a conversation you want to have and I appreciate you taking the time to come and talk. So, I thought I'd reciprocate a bit and make your favorites. If it happens to put you in a good mood, all the better.

BOBBY: Haha oh, I knew there was an ulterior motive.

SANDRA: Not really, Bobby. I just want us to work something out tonight that we both agree on. Something that doesn't make you feel like you're losing a battle, but something where I feel I'm getting some help and support with Mom. Besides, the kids and I love ribs and mac and cheese too.

BOBBY: All right, all right, sounds good. I really don't want to leave you hanging it when it comes to Mom, Sis. You know I love you and her and want the best, it's just hard.

SANDRA: I do know, Bobby. Like I said, I appreciate that you're here. Now, sit down and eat your food before it gets cold and then we'll talk.

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