



Arguing Can Help Your Relationship -- If You Follow These 5 Guidelines

The dream of "happily ever after" leaves many people believing that it's not okay to argue. But arguing, done well, helps build strong, healthy relationships.

Why Argue?

One ingredient of a great relationship is the ability to disagree with your partner. An argument is just a strong disagreement. It's not surprising that they happen -- when two people with different personalities and needs make a commitment to be together, there are going to be a few clashes. But when some people hold frustrations inside, they can build until they explode. Others keep their needs, goals and dreams to themselves until they hardly communicate at all -- and start to disconnect from the relationship.

Many people worry that arguments will hurt their relationship. But master couples therapist and researcher John Gottman found that arguments don't end relationships. In fact, people in great relationships argue as often as people who are headed for divorce do. But here is the key -- they argue differently.

Benefits of Disagreeing

- Disagreements keep frustration from building. They can be a way to let off steam, and to solve problems early on when they are still manageable.
- Disagreements can highlight the differences between you and your partner -- and many times it is these differences that attracted you in the first place. If you can respect your differences, they can add spice to your relationship.
- Disagreements can lead to deeper understanding. When you listen to your partner's side of the story, you can learn new things about his or her thoughts, strengths, fears, and values.
- Frustration can be a signal that an emotional need isn't being met. Whether the trigger is a messy house, a conflict about money, or a broken promise, something that you expected to happen...didn't. Understandably, you feel disappointed. When you can talk about this to your partner, there is a better chance your needs will be met in the future.

A Healthy Argument Is Not...

Arguing is not about criticism, blame, or name calling. It isn't abuse, verbal or physical. Rather, it is stating your needs clearly and respectfully.

When You Need a Break

For some people, disagreements are especially difficult. If you are one of these people, your whole body responds when you are upset. Your heart rate increases to more than 100 beats a minute. Your body goes into "fight or flight" mode -- even if all you are doing is sitting next to your partner, arms folded across your chest. Your thinking gets fuzzy, and you can't focus well. If this happens to you, you need a break to calm down. But don't just walk out on your partner -- plan the break in advance. Agree to give yourselves at least 30 minutes, but not more than 24 hours. During your break, don't rehearse the argument! Instead, use the time to calm yourself -- jog, listen to music, read a magazine, or anything else that helps you relax.

How to Argue Effectively

1. **Argue often.** Don't wait until you have a long list of disappointments, and bring them up all at once. Instead, talk about them as they happen, and your frustration is more likely to stay manageable.



2. **Argue gently.** Avoid criticism, name calling, and blame. These make the situation worse. Instead, focus on your feelings and needs, and on finding solutions.
3. **Argue about one thing at a time.** Before you start the conversation, think about the result you want. Focus on just that topic, and state your wishes clearly. If you have more than one topic you want to talk about, save the others for a different conversation.
4. **Argue for your partner's side too.** Ask about feelings; explore his or her point of view. Empathy is one of the most powerful tools you have for understanding your partner and building a happy, secure relationship.
5. **Have an after-argument check-in.** Couples with great relationships check in with their partner after an argument. If your words were a bit stronger than you meant them to be, now is the time to apologize, make up, and decide what to do differently next time. Even if you don't see things eye-to-eye, you can still show appreciation and respect.

If you follow these guidelines, your disagreements will be more focused and respectful. Even when your conversation gets heated, you will feel calmer, better about yourself, and better about your partner.

Arguments don't end relationships. Relationship problems result from bad arguing habits – criticism, blame, and hiding your needs. Arguing, done well, just might help you live happily ever after.

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