

By CATHY
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NO one likes to fight. In fact, most people will do everything to avoid fighting with their spouse. But many couples don't realise that "fights" are necessary and healthy sometimes, especially when there are conflicts, disagreements or unresolved issues that get pushed aside without being dealt with properly.

An argument or "fight" is a channel to bring such things into the open. After all, what people are afraid to talk out, they act out, through broken eye-contact, reduced physical contact, etc. Either way, the unresolved business cannot be ignored.

There are various ways people attempt to avoid unpleasant confrontations. They can be destructive and eventually cause resentment and destroy intimacy:

- **Silence:** this is a powerful and destructive weapon. In a disagreement, if one side lapses into silence it renders the partner helpless. Though this cuts short the argument, the issues are left unresolved.

- **Yielding:** sometimes people pay a high price to keep the peace. They appease their spouse or agree with him or her, even though deep inside they feel differently.

By doing so they not only cheat themselves but also deprive their spouse of the chance to understand them. In the short term, life may be smoother because of no disagreement, but in the long run individuals will feel submissive and indignant.

- **Quick fix:** whenever one side brings up a problem or issue which may require discussion, the other blurts out a hasty solution or suggestion.

This only shuts off one's spouse and indicates that "I am not interested in what you have to say." It also takes away the chance to explore differences which can help prevent future disagreements.

Often people get confused and believe they have to "win" an argument in order to stop it from dragging on. However, a properly conduct-

If you want to fight, then fight fairly...



"Typical, - the old silence trick eh?"

ed argument can open a channel to confront constructively the issues and differences. Through mutual effort consensus can be reached.

There are rules that should be remembered to turn an argument into a constructive experience.

- **Focus on the issue and not the person.** Sometimes couples express their differences or opinions, but before they know it, they end up arguing and lashing out at each other.

It is important to stick to the issue and avoid criticism or personal attacks. Identify one's own feelings and give opportunities for the partner to clarify. Then negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement.

A typical fight would sound like:

Mary: "You and your stupid family! I'm sick and tired of seeing them!"

Mike: "If you don't like it, then stay home!"

The constructive argument alternative should be:

Mary: "I'm not happy spending every weekend with your relatives. I feel

we have no time for ourselves."

Mike: "I feel it's my obligation, but I didn't know it bothered you so much."

- **Set a time to fight;** don't catch your partner by surprise. When one or both partners feel discussion is called for, notify the spouse and set an agreeable time so both sides feel prepared psychologically.

- **Don't accumulate unfinished business.** Once things get put off they can become distorted. Commitment to resolving conflict can also dissipate.

- **Focus on "here and now".** During the process of sorting out a disagreement, couples need to remind themselves to deal with the present issue instead of digging out past history as a weapon to attack each other.

- **Be specific.** Don't generalise. During arguments individuals tend to be more sensitive or defensive, so it is important to avoid using words like "never", "always", or "should". For example: you "never" support me or you "always" put me down.

One needs to be more specific when and how such impressions are received and deal with it directly without letting the anger spill over everything.

Fights or arguments are unavoidable within a marriage. The important thing is a couple's willingness to work through it together and use it as a growth experience.

One common complaint is not having the chance to talk things through before the situation builds up to an explosive stage. It would be helpful for a couple to schedule one evening per week for themselves.

On that specific night they will not accept any outside invitations and reserve time for each other to talk and be together. They can also use the time to discuss any unresolved business.

Commitment to keeping such an evening also shows commitment to marriage as a life-time partnership.

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