

Healthy Conflict:

Why you SHOULD Fight with your Partner

Learning to recognize patterns in the way you and your partner fight can help find solutions.

By April Galarza

The word “fight” has a bad connotation especially when talking about relationships. Frequent fighting is the beginning of the end, some have said. But I beg to differ. Thanks to some helpful insight my husband I gained during our pre-marital classes and plenty of experience in the category, we have learned that fighting in a relationship is to be expected and is necessary for making the relationship stronger and the intimacy between the partners deeper. “Conflict is the price smart couples pay for a deepening sense of intimacy,” According to Marriage and Partnership Magazine writers Les and Leslie Parrott. By fighting we bring our concerns out into the open. Instead

of ignoring our problems with our partner and praying they will change, fighting is an active solution to the everyday difference of opinions that occur between cou-

ples. No two people are alike and as of such, each person has their own opinion on practically everything.

Your opinion and that of your partner’s (no matter how similar your personalities) will not always be harmonious. The only appropriate way to deal with these issues is to communicate your beliefs and your opinions and then together find a solution that satisfies the both of you. Ideally couples should communicate about their differences instead of letting them accumulate. However, we hardly ever live in ideal situations and one partner or the other may believe that by giving in, or ignoring the issues they are avoiding conflict, when in actuality they are merely turning up the heat. If the issue is strong enough it will eventually surface. Contrary to popular belief, most fights in a relationship do not indicate a need for a break up. Although it may seem like the end of the relationship when you’re shouting obscenities and the door that just slammed shut sounds like a funeral dirge, in most cases a healthy fight between couples is a good thing. You have probably heard couples say “we never fight” but odds are they are lying, or fooling themselves. Most couples fight at least three times a year. It has been my experience that there are three types of arguments in a relationship. They are: The Bad Mood Battle, The Foundation Builder and the Deal Breaker.

The Bad Mood Battle is just what it sounds like. Grumpiness has many causes; exhaustion, stress and hunger to name a few. Unfortunately, couples may take out their negative feelings on each other. In this situation there is usually not a specific cause for the discord. If you leave the cantankerous person alone to cool off



and deal with their bad mood, they'll come around soon enough and will probably even apologize for their petulance. When my husband and I have this kind of fight it usually happens in the evening when we get home from work before either us have eaten. My husband and I have discovered that some

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days we need to disconnect for a while before we talk over things. We may need to veg out in front of the TV or Internet until we have calmed down from our stressful day. We need some alone time before we can answer the all consuming question “How was your day?” Once we've eaten and started to relax both of us are in a much more tolerable state for discussion. The best way to avoid the Bad Mood Battle is to catch yourselves when is happening and simply ask your partner, “Do you need some alone time?” or “Do you want to finish this discussion after we have both calmed down?” Odds are your partner will be as glad as you to have an out, and when you discuss the issue later civilly you'll probably discover that it was only bad attitudes that propelled it and not some specific problem.



Foundation Building fights happen less frequently than Bad Mood Battles but they always happen for a reason. Often the topic of this fight has come up in “discussion” many times before and one or both of you have reached a boiling point. Often these topics are hot button issues like finances, child rearing, religion, family involvement issues, etc. But they can also be as simple as leaving the toothpaste cap off one too many times or always forgetting to take out the trash. These arguments are accumulative and are often the pinnacle of shouting, cursing, and door slamming. Once the sparks have settled this argument should be followed by a discussion. It is important to identify

the exact cause of the argument and to make a plan for dealing with it. Unless the issue at hand is a deal breaker, i.e. dealing with a non-negotiable issue, this argument, however lively, is not the end of your relationship. Picture this: every couple is building a foundation of trust, love, honor, and respect for their relationship. Imagine that this foundation is a brick

house. When a couple builds a foundation they may not pay careful attention to every brick. One may smooth over an issue in their head instead of discussing it and finding a solution. Or an issue that was never an issue before may become one over time. For instance one partner, who formally stayed at home to take care of the kids, decides they want to go back to work after the kids start school because they would like to have a larger family income. The other partner, who feels they earn a sufficient living, would rather there was always somebody home for the kids. Imagine these issues are loose bricks. Sooner or later they will have to be addressed if you want to have a healthy foundation to your relationship. Every now and then one

of these bricks falls loose and a crack starts to form in the relationship. Foundation building fights happen when someone notices a fissure and raises the alarm. The couple needs to discuss their conflict and make a plan for the future. This type of fight has to happen to maintain the relationship!

Early into our relationship

my husband and I discovered a problem. As soon as he got home I immediately wanted to embrace him, snuggle with him, lay my head on his shoulder, etc. But my husband would get frustrated asking me, “Do you have any Lumbar support?” and “Do you always need to lean on me?” At first I thought to myself he must not love me, or want to be with me. How could he not want to hold me? But this was only an assumption. What was actually going on was as much as I needed cuddling time, he needed alone time. So after a door slamming, pillow pitching fight, we figured out what the problem was. Our solution was fairly simple. We would both make an effort to give each other what we needed. That way I knew if my husband played video games for a while, he was not doing it to ignore or neglect me, but because he was having his much needed alone time. And periodically my husband will inquire about my “cuddle meter” which is a joke between us referring to my need to be embraced. If I answer it’s kind of low, or I need a hug, as long as it’s not during his alone time, he’ll comply. In this way both our needs are satisfied and life is much more harmonious. If any of the values in which a relationship is built upon are infringed, it causes a crack in the foundation of the relationship. It is actually a wonderful thing if you and your partner care enough to fight about these infringements and thus approach them, as opposed to sweeping them under the rug. The real time to worry is if there aren’t any fights at all, because this means that one partner or both are ignoring the things that bother them, or compromising at the loss of their beliefs.

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The final type of fight in a relationship is called The Deal Breaker fight.

In the case of both of the above fights the couple was able to find a compromise for their difference in opinions and was able to repair the kinks in their relationship. This final fight happens when there is no discernable solution to an issue. In other words every person has a value or tradition which is non-negotiable. For example; you must live in your home town or your ideal partner must be the one who stays at home or any children you have must be raised a specific religious faith, etc. Arguments that concern these types of issues test the limits of practical compromise and it may behave the both of you to go your separate ways. However, most issues are negotiable, it is only the deal breaking issues that can end a relationship. In the beginning of a relationship couples should talk over all the hot button issues to make sure they are on the same page. They need to discover for themselves what these are and to share them with their partner. This is something



highly stressed during pre-marital classes. We did all sorts of exercises that helped us to discover more about how our partner's ticked. If one partner, for example, is set on having children, and the other doesn't want any, this relationship will probably not work out. However if one partner wants six children and the other wants only two, this couple can probably find a compromise on the number of the children. A deal breaker is the thing that you can not imagine living your life without. It is the only thing (or things) you refuse to sacrifice. If the issue at hand is one of these, this could be a relationship ending fight.

No one ever said that maintaining a relationship was going to be easy. Relationships are hard work. But because you love each other and you truly want to be together, committed couples should allow arguments to occur. They shouldn't be apprehensive of differing opinions or hesitant to voice them. Don't allow the foundation of your relationship to crumble because you are afraid of too much conflict. Instead, battle it out, find a solution and let your foundation be re-built stronger than ever. §

Editor's Note:

This is not the original formatting found in Issue #8 of Spirit: A Magazine Designed for the Diverse Woman. I redid it using Adobe InDesign in order to demonstrate my design skills.

-April Galarza