

5 Ways to Never Fight With Your Spouse

My first few years of marriage with Lauren were full of soul-shriveling conflict. One of the ways God led me out of that conflict (or maybe into it in a way that led to health and healing) was through the teachings of Pastor Tommy Nelson out of Denton Bible Church on Song of Solomon in the Old Testament of the Bible. Here are some “nevers” I learned from the principals of conflict that Tommy laid out in some of his books and sermons.

These are not “best practices” in the sense that if you put them into practice, you are guaranteed positive responses. They are instead “gospel practices,” ways to show grace in the way you talk through conflict with your spouse. They have less to do with getting something from your spouse and more to do with what is the right way to speak to them, regardless of their response.

So here are five “nevers” of communication, especially as it pertains to conflict:

1. Never respond to your mate brashly.

This has a lot do with thoughtfulness and maturity in responding, especially to charges or accusations. It is about moving from reaction mode to responding mode. Lashing out in anger is a sign of a lack of self-control. There will be sometimes when you ought to just breathe in when something has stung you, lest you say something back that’s just completely irrational and hurtful. Maybe you need to count to 10 or find another way to think and process before responding, but never speak rashly. Proverbs 29:11 says, “A fool utters all his mind, but a wise man keeps it in until afterwards.” Slow down, breathe, think through what you’re saying. Never speak rashly.

2. Never touch your mate out of temper or frustration, ever.

There are no ifs, ands or buts to this. Physical abuse of any kind—even just a slap—is totally off limits always, forever, end of story. If you find yourself struggling with this, you ought to start seeing a trained counselor without delay.

3. Never seek to shame your spouse in public (or in private for that matter).

This sin is as huge as it is common. Have you ever been at a table when this has happened? Doesn't it just create a stifling sense of awkwardness around the whole thing? Never publicly embarrass your mate. It's obviously a handy way to humiliate them and to "put them in their place," but it's so damaging to the soul. The humiliation and the shame don't dissipate easily, if ever. It also wins you no allies, anyway; most people in these settings tend to immediately sympathize with your spouse and think you're a jerk. So by all means, if you want to kill the mood of a social engagement, shame your spouse and lose friends; go right on and embarrass them. But if you want to do the right thing, hold your tongue. The desire to criticize and knock your spouse down to size in the presence of others comes from hell.

4. Never fight in front of your kids (or use them as leverage in a disagreement).

I come from a home that had some massive issues. So I've had a lot to work through. But by God's grace, in 17 years of being with Lauren, we've never yelled at each other. Oh, we've had plenty of those "Don't ever do that again" kind of moments, an unbelievable amount of those. But we don't scream at each other.

This becomes extra important in moments when we're all together as a family and some kind of conflict might come up between Lauren and myself. It usually takes place in the car and has something to do with getting lost. My wife has an

uncanny sense of direction. I mean, she's like a human GPS device. Me? I have major directional issues. I am what the experts call "directionally challenged." And people who give me directions often make me mad because they'll say things like, "Go East on 35." And I'm thinking, "Go East? Do I have a compass? Am I Davy Crockett?" Seriously. Like, why not say, "Take a left?" That's easy. You say take a left, I know how to go left. But you telling me to drive forty clicks due East, and I just want to punch you in your stupid face.

So getting lost is one of my most frustrating experiences. Sometimes we'll all be in the car, and I won't know where I'm going and Lauren will make fun of me or laugh at my poor sense of direction, and I'll get irritated. I may get sarcastic in response. And my kids know. They know I shouldn't talk to Mom like that. It's an important lesson for all of us. They are learning from Lauren and me how it is that mature and healthy couples handle conflict. And if we're always yelling at each other, losing our tempers, freaking out about unmet expectations, guess what they think is normal?

I promise you this: You are teaching your children how to fight. In your home right now, you are teaching your daughters how to treat their husbands and you are teaching your sons how to treat their wives. They're soaking it all up. They're taking from your home life their expectation of "normal family life."

Be careful how you handle conflict in front of your kids. And never use them in any way to win an argument.

5. Never mention your spouse's parents or any other family member.

Now this is the part of a fight when things get really crazy. Because as I said, we bring our ideas of normalcy into our new home lives with our spouse. And we end up doing a lot of measuring and having a lot expectations.

In my house, growing up, you know, you might just put your dirty towels on the floor, and mom would eventually come by and pick them up. Pretty sweet deal. Then she'd washed it and fold it and put it back in the cabinet. So when I married Lauren, I sort of just started leaving my towels around. I thought that was normal. And she would say, "Are you serious?"

I was coming from a family background with one set of routines and expectations and she was coming from another. I was expecting her to adjust to my expectations, not really thinking that I ought to adjust to hers, because in her mind, it wasn't really about the towel, but about respect. But if we don't handle this difference in expectations well, it could become an all-out assault on our entire families! Like, one family is a bunch of idiotic cavemen to live *that* way. Or the other family's a bunch of uptight neat-freaks to live *that* way. It can turn into a barrage of insults on each other's families, which can be extremely destructive.

These tips are just the tip of the iceberg in what you should never do in communication, particularly in conflict and in marriage. You can see five more "nevers" in my book, *The Mingling of Souls*. We spouses can learn to serve and sacrifice and to submit in such a way that marriage becomes the real, deep, lasting joy it is meant to be as it glorifies Jesus Christ.

Excerpted from The Mingling of Souls: God's Design for Love, Sex, Marriage and Redemption by Matt Chandler Copyright 2015 David C Cook. Used with permission. Visit .