

5 Wise Ways to Respond After a Fight With Your Spouse

Chances are good you and your spouse have had a fight. Perhaps you even had a fight during the just-ended Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Changes in routine, travel, holidays, entertaining guests or having kids home from school may be triggers for a fight. Of course there are the “normal” triggers such as communication failures, money challenges or differences in desires for intimacy. But what’s most important is what you do *after* a fight with your spouse.

Conflict in marriage is inevitable. In fact there are ways conflict can be leveraged to actually strengthen your marriage. (I’m not talking about violence or abuse.) It’s what you do next that counts.

Retreating into your respective corners and pouting doesn’t work. Neither does mentally storing up ammunition for your next fight, or waiting for the perfect opportunity to one-up your spouse up by dropping the perfect one-liner.

Here are five healthy and necessary things to do after a fight with your spouse that will move your marriage further along the road to learning to love well.

1. Let emotions cool off.

Boiling-over emotions do not make for clear thinking—or for loving relationships. Trying to get your spouse to understand you or have a sane conversation when anger, hurt, frustration or fatigue are in charge just prolongs the fight.

You can shorten a fight by saying something like, “I’m upset right now. I need a break. Let’s talk about this tonight.” Or tomorrow. Or sometime soon.

And then follow through! Walking away from a fight can be healthy—if you return quickly to the relationship and to the issue at hand. Use the break to let your emotions cool off and then do your homework.

2. Check your own heart.

It takes two to fight. Something triggered an emotional response in *you*, or there would have been no fight. Look for what that is. Which expectation was not met? What need were you looking to get filled? What wound in your heart was triggered? Where was fear stirred up? What untransformed part of your character did this uncover?

This step does not mean your spouse is off the hook. It does mean that the only person you can change or control is you. Invest some intentional work in looking at your own soul. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how He sees you. What step do you need to take in your own heart?

3. Seek your spouse's perspective.

After you've thought through your own issues, intentionally look at the situation from your spouse's perspective. Try to look at the world through their eyes. Is your spouse's heart evil? Only God can absolutely know that, but your best Spirit-informed answer to that question does make a difference. Is your spouse growing—and struggling along the way? Are they responding out of their own wounds? Do they value something you haven't fully understood? Were their expectations disappointed? What are your spouse's intentions?

Being curious can be powerful. You're not looking to either blame your spouse or excuse their bad behavior; you're looking to understand. And perhaps your spouse's perspective can inform your own.

4. Talk about it.

A good place to begin is sincerely asking for forgiveness. For the perhaps 5 percent of the fight that was your “fault,” own that and apologize without excuse. If your self-reflection has led you to realize your spouse’s perspective in a new dimension, say so.

So choose the time and place carefully. If at all possible, choose a time when your spouse’s emotions are also cooled off and he or she can hear you well. Say something like, “I’m sorry I discounted your perspective on spending that money (or whatever). Please forgive me. I don’t want to fall into this fight again. Can we talk about our financial goals (or whatever) so we can be more on the same page going forward?”

5. Address deeper issues.

Sometimes those deeper issues will be on you; you may need to do some uncomfortable heart work with the Holy Spirit, or seek healing for some of your own wounds. Sometimes those deeper issues will be facing the reality that your husband or wife is behaving badly; you may need to set some difficult boundaries. Sometimes those deeper issues will be the relationship between you, and you may need some intentional structured sessions of communication to help you move forward. (Our *Guide to Healthy Communication in Marriage* talks more about this.)

Talking about deeper issues may lead to some difficult conversations. Staying engaged is important; you may have to work hard to stay engaged if you normally avoid conflict or let problems go unaddressed. You may need to get some professional help. What is NOT an option is to do nothing. Continuing to fight keeps you on the vicious cycle of destruction. Getting to the deeper issues is the only way to make progress.

And you *can* make progress!

However often fights cloud your marriage, going through these five steps will definitely make your home more peaceful and

has a good chance of resulting in a more loving and satisfying relationship.

Your Turn: *What level of fighting has your marriage experienced? Which of these steps do you most need to employ after a fight with your spouse? Leave a comment below.* {eo}

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