

How You Can De-Escalate Conflicts in Your Marriage

When you get married, you become a unit and become one. This is not an easy process.

Yelling, silence, long talks, nights sleeping on the sofa and feelings of under-appreciation are all included in the cycle of marriage. But when you get to the other side, you will have built a strong, beautiful marriage.

I want to provide some tips on avoiding pain and conflict in your marriage. Hopefully you will take these with you on the road to becoming one.

All relationships can be painful, whether child-parent, student-teacher, employee-employer, brother-sister, friend-friend or husband-wife. In each relationship, there is always a variation of pain. If we accept that pain will come, it will be easier to process that pain when it does occur.

But just because this pain exists does not mean there isn't hope. Pain doesn't mean you married the wrong person. In fact, I like to think of pain as a sign that something is alive and needs attention.

Are you in a painful day of your marriage? That's okay. It is a sign that your marriage is alive. Are you in pain? These painful events will spark one or both of you to mature, and you will become even closer to each other than before.

Conflict is a precursor to change and inward growth. When you marry another person, a whole entire universe of separate ideas, experiences and agendas must merge into one with yours. The process of exposing your competing ideas to each other will bring eventual agreement. But there will be conflict in the process.

This conflict could be about the small things (like agreeing on how to fold the socks) or about really big things (like money or sex). To de-escalate your future conflicts, establish guidelines and principles in the early stages of your marriage to which you both promise to adhere.

For example, one principle my wife and I use for the smaller conflicts is: "If I am doing it, I am doing it right. If you criticize me, you get to do it." This sparks us to challenge ourselves: Is it really that important that my socks get folded neatly? And if it really is that important to me, I put my energy into doing it the way I want it done, instead of requiring my spouse to conform to my way of doing things.

Another suggestion I have for marriage conflict is to stay focused on only one problem at a time. When we fight about several problems at once, we are rarely effective at finding a resolution. In fact, we are likely to get angrier the more conflicts we bring into the mix. The more blame we place on each other, the longer it will take for us to reconnect.

My third suggestion is to hear each other out—to completion—before tackling a conflict. Even something as small as determining how the family will fold socks can make a partner feel disrespected, unheard or unimportant. If you hear each other out first and air all your feelings, you'll save a lot of arguing time.

My fourth suggestion is about symbols. Perhaps your wife's father bought flowers for her mother on every anniversary. Your wife has come to equate flowers on your anniversary with the love and respect her parents showed for each other. When you do not give your wife flowers on your anniversary, she might become upset and hurt. You're confused about your wife's feelings and why she is upset. But the lack of flowers has made her question if your marriage is as solid as her parents' was. Flowers, here, are a symbol.

Many women have symbols—symbols men hopelessly do not understand. A lot of conflict can arise from symbols. The man will become frustrated with his wife for behavior he does not understand, and the woman will become frustrated because her partner does not understand her symbol. Men: Ask your wife about her symbols. Have her explain them to you. Women: Your husband is absolutely clueless about symbols. Disclose these to him and help him understand.

My fifth suggestion is to learn your partner's buttons. If, during a conflict, your partner is giving you a Level 20 response when you were expecting a Level 2 response, you have found a button. This is probably a trigger from their childhood. When a button is pushed, that person may be too irrational to process anything besides their button-response, so it is best to leave the conflict and allow the spouse to recompose himself/herself. Identify each other's buttons. This will save you a lot of needless conflicts. (Additionally, if you realize a button is too painful for you, you might want to consider seeing a counselor to help you.)

My sixth and final suggestion for conflict is to brainstorm solutions with each other. Your combined creativity will yield ideas that are guaranteed to be better than anything you can come up with by yourself. Hear each other out and then sleep on it instead of bullying your spouse to acquiesce to what you perceive is the best solution.

As a closing exercise to this post, I want you to think about your marriage as you would a child. Getting to meet your partner, dating, becoming engaged—this is all part of the gestation period of your marriage. The ceremony itself is like the delivery-room moment of your marriage. Marriage, in its early stages, is like a child in infancy: You focus on immediate needs such as food, shelter and jobs. You are learning about your spouse at a rapid rate. The marriage grows, year after year, and starts to take roots. Your marriage grows up as you tackle more hurdles and mature

together.

When you have children, you begin to have a whole new set of issues and conflicts to navigate. You both become more selfless and grow a lot during this middle school period of your marriage. As your children mature, their growth serves to clarify your values as a couple during your high school period of marriage. Remember, navigating from infancy to adulthood in your life is very similar to growing up in marriage. Though it may be an arduous process, it will definitely be rewarding.
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*The preceding is an excerpt from **Dr. Doug Weiss'** book The Miracle of Marriage.*

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