

This Method of 'Arguing' Can Help Married Couples Avoid Major Hurt

Tim and Darla were a precious seminary couple. Tim was from North Carolina and Darla from Alabama originally.

Tim and Darla just celebrated their third year of marriage. Tim had one more year of school left before he completed his master's in divinity. He had wanted to be a pastor his whole life. When other kids in his neighborhood wanted to play house or war, Tim wanted to play church and yes, he was always the preacher.

Darla's parents were not Christians until she was in high school, when her dad lost his company to bankruptcy. Darla and Tim met in Bible college. They dated and stayed pure and accountable to their mentors at school. They married in their last year of college and lived on campus.

Tim and Darla had a "huge problem," according to them both. No, it wasn't money, friends or even the church they faithfully attended. It took a while for them to explain their problem between the, "I'm embarrassed, it's awful, and we both still want to be in the ministry" before they could let themselves disclose their problem.

Tim leaned nervously toward me as he took a breath and blurted out, "It's awful." He paused for another breath as if waiting for more courage to fill his body before he spoke. He continued to speak. "We fight."

I really felt this was anticlimactic. I was expecting some deep dark secret in one of their souls.

Tim went on to explain that he knew everybody disagreed from

time to time, but he and Darla fought. He stated he never saw his parents fight the way he and his wife did. He was really concerned his marriage wouldn't make it, and his call to ministry would never come true.

As we continued, I realized Tim was right when he said that when Darla and he fought, they really fought. The fights started about anything. To top it off, they were both so ashamed of the way they acted that they could barely attempt to talk about the issues that started the fight in fear of igniting the bomb that kept going off in their relationship.

Tim and Darla didn't know how to handle conflict. Tim never saw conflict growing up, and Darla was repeating behaviors she saw in her non-Christian childhood. They do not know how to resolve conflict. What they needed was a set of tools or a path to learn how to fight in 10 minutes.

Imagine how Tim and Darla feel now that they can argue in less than 10 minutes and reach a conclusion. They have saved hours and hours of time. Tim is now confident that the ministry is a sure thing, and Darla's singing is clear of any voices telling her she is a hypocrite to sing in front of others because of the way she treats Tim.

What happened to Tim and Darla isn't a miracle, although it feels that way to them. But they learned how to have a 10-minute fight and actually get to a solution they could both live with. How, you ask? Again, I am glad you are paying attention. I want to outline the eight steps to having a 10-minute argument.

The 10-Minute Argument

State One Problem

When couples get going even in my office, they can go from subject to subject to the past, quoting others and a whole lot of battle techniques you might use on someone you didn't love.

Regardless of the reason for jumping around, you have to state one problem if you are going to have a 10-minute argument.

I've learned as a counselor that not all couples fight to solve a problem. For some it is meant to show who's the boss; who is in control; who has more anger, hate or rage; who can think the fastest, manipulate the other person or sometimes just so they can kiss and make up.

But like Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:31, "But earnestly covet the greater gifts. Yet I will show you a more excellent way." I believe there is a better way for Christian couples to resolve conflict in a way that leads to peace, respect and solutions. The first step to this process is to state one problem.

A fun way to interrupt an argument is to continue to ask your spouse, "What exactly are we trying to resolve here?"

Identify Feelings

This right here is where most couples blow it big time. Most of us have not had any training for identifying or communicating our feelings.

It's very important that both of you list your feelings. Both of you will have them, and if they are not communicated, they will usually show up in less direct and unhealthy ways. Using separate pieces of paper, write down your feelings while your spouse does the same.

Now after you write down your feelings, I don't want you to talk about them with each other yet. Make sure to look over your feelings and also make sure your feelings are related to the problem at hand. Try to avoid using feelings to attack your spouse. Remember in a 10-minute argument, your spouse is your ally toward a solution, not the enemy in the battle of eternal right and eternal wrong. You are not wearing the white cape while they wear the black cape. The galaxies are not

depending on you to kill the black-caped person so peace and harmony can once again exist.

I know it sounds like I am exaggerating, but if you saw how some couples draw out their laser swords when they argue, you could easily see how I might come up with this analogy.

Create Solutions

Now here may be a novel idea for some couples: Create multiple solutions. Yes, most problems or issues have several ways to solve them. You see, when you come at conflict in a right or wrong position, you are rarely fighting about the issue. What I mean is you aren't fighting for the heavyweight title of Mr. or Mrs. Right.

This creative solution is like taking two horses running full speed toward the solution. The right/wrong paradigm approach has the horses fighting each other and not going anywhere clearly or in a timely manner.

Communicate

Start with the agreed-upon problem. Then let one person share their feelings about that problem. There are two very important rules when the other person is sharing their feelings. First, you listen to your spouse. I mean look at them in the eye and try to hear with your heart. This is better when it is a heart-to-heart communication, not a head-to-head one. The second rule to follow when someone is sharing their feelings is "absolutely no feedback." You are listening not judging or assessing.

Remember, feelings are feelings. Feelings are not facts, truth or necessarily reality. You can feel fat and actually weigh less than yesterday. Feelings are valuable to identify, communicate and listen to, but they are feelings: nothing more, nothing less.

Then with no feedback, move on to the solutions. Again, when sharing your solutions, there is no feedback. What can happen is if you start giving feedback, you can shortcut the process and get into an argument. In the 10-minute argument, you don't need to get into feedback and yell at each other. Simply go to the next step of the process.

Combine Your List

When you have two brilliant people in the same marriage as you do, there is a large chance of coming up with the same ideas. This will almost always happen when solving a problem creatively. Then the next step is to take all of the husband's ideas and all the wife's ideas and put them on both of your tablets.

Each of you has your mutual list. Keep your list on separate tablets so you can take the next step in the 10-minute argument.

Vote

That's absolutely right; you get to vote on your options. I know it takes all the anger and manipulation out of the equation, but imagine the time and energy you can save.

The voting process is simple. Each of you gives a weighted response to each idea. From 1 to 10, you vote on each idea. One means you don't like it and 10 means you do. Each item gets a number, be it 3, 6, 9 or 10. I will warn you, though: If you vote all ones or all 10s, you are basically giving your spouse the ability to make the decisions by the way they vote. Usually an idea you largely disagree on rarely wins.

Each of you should vote separately on your options, then take your votes and place them on one piece of paper.

In the case of a tie, simply flip a coin to determine the winner.

Arguing is part of marital bliss. However, it doesn't need to be ugly, shaming or in any way harmful to each other. You both have great ideas and resources to solve problems. God has put you together so that together, you can be a team to solve most things that come your way. {eoa}

Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is a nationally known author, speaker and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books, including *The 20-Minute Marriage Principle*. You may contact Dr. Weiss via his website, or on his Facebook, by phone at 719-278-3708 or through email at heart2heart@.