

GREAT DATES #8

Resolving Conflict

Honestly

When we were first in love, we thought we might be the exception and be the couple who never had any conflict. That did not last past the honeymoon and our whole first year of marriage consisted of statements like “I did not know you were like this!” It took us years to learn to manage our differences, conflicts that arose from them and the anger that hung around when the conflicts were not resolved. I totally agree with the statement from researchers into successful marriages that the key to a marriage surviving is learning to handle and process conflict and anger.

NOTE: This is a Date Night, so we are not going to rehash ongoing arguments! This is an opportunity to talk in a relaxed and enjoyable setting about better ways to manage conflict when it does come up. So agree right now, out loud, to each other, that this topic will not escalate tonight and ruin your evening!!

Dave and Claudia Arp identify 5 or 6 ways people typically handle conflict. They use animals to identify the styles:

- The Turtle – the Withdrawer: Turtles avoid conflict by withdrawing either physically or emotionally
- The Skunk – the Attacker: Skunks spray people verbally when they feel threatened
- The Skurtle: this style attacks verbally and then withdraws
- The Chameleon – the Yelder: This style goes with whatever the prevailing crowd is going, thus avoiding conflict, but never expressing a real opinion
- The Owl – the Intellectualizer: this style avoids feelings at all costs, dealing only with facts
- The Gorilla – the Winner: this style has to win at all costs, and will use manipulation and intimidation if necessary

Do you identify with any of these styles? You may have more than one style depending on the issue or the timing of a conflict. Share with each other your

own style if none of these fit. Try not to label your spouse unless they ask for your input.

When approaching conflict the goal is to be able to look at any issue from the **SAME SIDE**. We are allies not enemies. You can either work together against a problem or you can let a problem cause you to work against each other.

Let's walk through the process the Arps suggest. When something happens that makes one of you feel anger, that person needs to let the other know that something is making them feel angry. You do not just attack the other person or withdraw or.....Part of this is also the agreement that when one or the other of you feels angry, you agree not to attack each other. The person who is not angry agrees not to defend himself/herself, but to just listen. "Honey, I am getting angry about this, but I have agreed not to attack you, so could we talk about what is causing my anger and see if we can work something out?"

Anger dissipates quite quickly when the person who is angry is heard and not defended against. You may need to make an appointment to meet at a more convenient time to work toward a solution if you cannot stay with it at the moment.

Stephen Covey, in his Seven Habits of Highly Successful People book, identifies one of his habits as "Seeking first to understand, rather than to be understood." When your spouse identifies something that is frustrating, seek to understand the issue from their point of view thoroughly before defending yourself or moving to solve the issue. I tell couples that they need to get doctorate degrees in understanding and knowing each other.

STEPS TO RESOLVING CONFLICT

1. Agree on what the issue is and that you both want a solution. Write down the problem you want to resolve.
2. Identify which one of you needs a solution.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions and list them. Think outside the box and come up with some creative solutions.
4. From the possible solutions, select a plan of action. Choose things you both would like to try. If the plan does not work, go back to the list and choose something else to try. Write the plan of action down.

OUR ANGER CONTRACT

- We agree to tell each other when we are getting angry.
- We agree to not vent our anger at each other.
- We agree to ask for the other's help in solving whatever is causing the anger.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE EVENING

1. Which animal style tends to fit you? If it is more than one, which fits you in which area of your life?
2. How does the idea of an anger contract sound to you both? Can you see something like this working for both of you? What changes would you like to make to the contract to make it your own?
3. Anger is an emotion that many people are not comfortable with. What messages did you get about anger growing up? Is it possible to be angry and “sin not” as the bible says? What would that look like?
4. How does the idea of being on the same side of an issue sound to you? I often say to couples that if something is important to one of you, then it is automatically important to the other one of you, even if you don’t quite “get it.”
5. Understanding does not mean you agree with something. It just means that you can see how it would make sense for this person to feel the way they do given the situation and their history, personality, value system, etc.
6. What would it take to feel like you really understand where your spouse is coming from on an issue? What would it feel like to be understood that way?
7. If you are brave, try to resolve a small conflict tonight, using the 4 steps listed above. Practice on something that neither of you feels really strongly about and see if it works. If not, can it and have some fun anyway. If it works, celebrate!

Next Date Night is **May 15th** and the topic is
“Building a Creative Love Life”