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Tips for Resolving Conflicts in Your Marriage©

I recently received a question from a friend of mine about problems she and her husband are having resolving conflicts. This is such a common problem in relationships. If you can relate, you're normal! This is how she shared her frustrations...

"I get so frustrated with how my husband and I can't resolve conflicts. Is there a "right" way that works?"

Here's my answer... This is such a great question! Know that you're not alone. Many couples feel ongoing frustration over their inability to come up with solutions that satisfy both people. While coming up with a fool-proof plan for resolving conflict is a worthy goal, it is also very important to realize the important foundation that needs to be in place in order for couples to work together to solve conflicts.

According to John Gottman, Ph.D., happy marriages are based on a deep friendship... a mutual respect for one another, and an enjoyment of one another's company. This deep friendship does not prevent arguments; instead it gives couples a "secret weapon" that helps those arguments not get out of hand.

When couples have not been able to build this friendship, they may find themselves endlessly fighting the same arguments over and over again. Most arguments are not about the issue argued about, but instead are more about a deep frustration or loneliness in the marriage. Interestingly enough, most conflicts around sexual intimacy could be solved by focusing on building the friendship in the marriage first.

It might be helpful to know that couples have different styles of conflict. No one style is deemed better than another. What does matter is that *the style work for both people*. Another surprising fact is that most marital

arguments cannot be resolved, when the focus is on changing the other person. It simply can't be done. Couples would fare much better to work on building the friendship in the marriage and *out of this closeness*, work toward coming up with solutions that are good for both people.

In his book, "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work", Gottman offers lots of helpful and practical ideas for healing and strengthening marriages. I'll share two now. These hints are helpful when sharing a problem in any relationship you are in.

1. When bringing up a problem, start out softly rather than harshly. Research has shown that most of the time if an argument starts harshly, it is doomed to failure. If you can't bring up your concern in a calm manner, take a breath, slow down, and try again later.
2. When you share your concern, share a complaint, not a criticism. A complaint shares about a specific action your spouse did or didn't do that is distressing. A criticism is more hurtful in that it adds negative words about your mate's personality, character, or motives. For example, a complaint would be: "I'm upset that you didn't take out the trash like you said." A criticism would be: "You are so lazy. All you care about is yourself. Are you ever going to take out the trash?" This approach is insulting, and it will be normal for your spouse to become defensive, rather than hearing and addressing your concern. This approach will not get you the result you are wanting.

I wish you well in your work to better your marriage. Don't give up, the work is worth it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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