



When Disagreements Arise

When disagreements arise, plan to use the skills you've learned so far in this workbook. These skills, if practiced, will provide a safe place in which you and your partner can always ask each other for help, rely on one another, and share your vulnerabilities. Devote yourself to your partner's sense of safety and security and not simply to your idea about what that should be.

What may make you feel safe and secure may not be what your partner requires from you. Your job is to work on knowing what matters to your partner and how to make him or her feel safe and secure.

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1. Losing is not allowed. Of course, no one wants to lose. Couples have to rewire their ways of fighting. Think in terms of defusing conflict that turns ugly rather than necessarily resolving the issue entirely. Most importantly, when you fight, both of you have to win, or you will both lose, and that's not an acceptable outcome.
2. Giving up is not allowed either. Maintaining a balanced and healthy relationship is not about abdicating your position or giving up your self-interest. It's about wrestling with your partner, engaging without hesitation or avoidance, and at the same time being willing to relax your own position. You go back and forth until you come up with something that's good for both of you. You take what you each bring to the table and with it create something new that provides mutual relief and satisfaction.
3. Every fight brings a new day. We all know that we can be tough, and even more so in the midst of a battle. Don't expect 100 percent success at your first try. If the minute a conversation overheats, you forget everything you've learned, don't give up; try again tomorrow. Couples who are in it for the long haul know how to play and fight well, remain fearlessly confident in the resilience of their relationship, and don't try to avoid conflict.

Expecting your partner to share your values at all times and in all ways leads to great disillusionment, disappointment, and anger.

The next time there's a fight, instead of expecting your partner to function as you do, put your collective energies into making sure the solution feels meaningful and worthwhile for both of you. Keep at the negotiations until you reach that point where there can be no forward movement, no decision-making, and no action unless you and your partner agree that the solution will work for both of you.

Being an expert on your partner means you are continually alert to his or her moods and feelings. If your partner is bothered, you know it immediately. It doesn't matter whether your partner is bothered because of something occurring between the two of you or because of something outside the relationship. In either case, you are enough of an expert that you can speedily make an educated guess about which of his or her three or four bad things has been touched off. There is no reason to let any problems fester.

Seeing your partner in distress should be the signal to *stop the presses* before continuing on with anything.

In this way, couples seek to become competent managers of each other. In fact, their competence as partners is not unlike the competence of parents who want to soothe their child's painful feelings and cultivate positive ones.

The role of a primary partner is a big one. It entails taking good care of one another. This works by both partners being fully mutual and dedicated to the relationship. Both partners need to become experts on one another. With this kind of arrangement, nobody really loses, and everybody truly wins.

Five Secure Principles for Resolving Conflict

1. Show basic concern for the other person's well-being.
2. Maintain focus on the problem at hand.
3. Refrain from generalizing the conflict.
4. Be willing to engage.
5. Effectively communicate feelings and needs.