

Better Arguments=Better Communication

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Arguing happened, happens, and will continue to happen.

All couples argue. Even those sickly-sweet-disgusting people you see making out at the mall have had, or will have arguments. But arguments aren't bad and if looked at constructively can be a neon sign pointing to bigger issues that need attention or resolution.

When angry, we are biased and believe everything we say makes perfect sense and everything our partner says makes us wonder how they manage to dress themselves. I assure you, your partner thinks the same way. But when the dust clears and our emotions de-escalate we see clearer and, hopefully, remember why we fell in love in the first place.

Personalities, history and culture affect our arguing styles.

You yell, your partner goes silent. You cry your partner wants to leave the house. We didn't show up in our adulthood and then learn to argue. Nope, we can thank our parents or other influential adults, siblings and culture for that. We also argue the way we argue because it has worked for us in the past. It may not have worked well, but it still worked in some way or we would not still be arguing the same way with different people.

But you have a choice concerning how you argue. Wouldn't it be great if every time you had an argument you had a tool chest you could reach for that could help you get through the argument and with a better understanding of yourself and your partner? I think so. So, create a set of rules/tools that you use when you argue.

Note: You **must** be willing to observe the rules, give and receive trust, apologize (apologizing is a sign of strength, not weakness), and own your contribution. Trust me, you contributed.

Create your rules when you are happy.

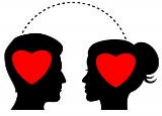
When we are in the glow of making up after an argument the last thing you want to do is rehash the argument in any way, shape or form. The truth is, this is the BEST time to discuss the argument. Maybe not the actual argument, but establishing ground rules for your next argument. At this time you are calm, open, happy and engaged with each other during your post-argument honeymoon phase. You and your partner will be much more open to each other's suggestions. Here a few rule ideas:

- No name calling or attacking each other's character
- No violently slamming or throwing anything
- Either partner can call a TIME OUT if they feel they escalating to an uncomfortable level of anger.
- Either partner can call a SAFETY ZONE and retreat to a quiet place to be introspective.
- No sleeping in different beds
- No driving away. A walk is okay, but announce you are leaving and state that you are coming back, "I need a few minutes to gather my thoughts. I'm going to walk a few blocks and will be back in about 30 minutes." The other partner must accept the need to separate. It is a sign of respecting boundaries and will build trust with your partner.

Here are a few details around the rule examples and additional suggestions for productive arguments:

▪ **Note taking**

- Often we forget what we are arguing about, so why not take notes? Of course, you should both agree beforehand that you are going to try this. Don't just whip out a notebook and say "write your thoughts down!" Don't show your notes to each other. This is your angry voice talking and doesn't represent who you truly are, it's just a part of you.



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- Writing notes **does not** give you permission to call your honey “a dirty rat-bastard” on paper or “gotcha” points. Instead, write down what you think is going wrong: talking over one another, doesn’t understand me, I’m not making any sense, he/she thinks I’m crazy, I wish I communicated my heart better, I’m so frustrated, I’m afraid you are going to leave, etc. You can share this (cleaned up) information later when you are calm. If the argument natural de-escalates, great! But if it doesn’t either partner can call a **TIME OUT!**
- **Calling and respecting a TIME OUT!**
 - Calling a TIME OUT may be one of the kindest things you can do for your partner and your relationship. When respected and observed, the TIME OUT should put an immediate halt to the conversation (no mumbles or door slams from either person), with the understanding that the person who called the TIME OUT must reach out (within 24 hours) and schedule a time to resume the conversation. A few days or even a week later is fine. During that time, be kind to each other. Remember you were IN an argument, YOU AREN’T THE ARGUMENT.
- **Calling and respecting a SAFE Zone**
 - Some people need to go to a quiet space and be left alone so they can de-escalate, reflect and gather their bearings. However, sometimes the other partner thinks the need to be alone is ridiculous because **they don’t need** to go to a quiet space. Well, different people need different things. The partner that needs a SAFE Zone should say something like, “I’m really wiped right now. I need a few minutes in my safe zone to get my bearings. I’ll come out when I’m better company.” This announces what is going on, lets the other partner know they aren’t leaving out of anger or to punish, and states they will return. Leaving the person alone demonstrates that you hear and respect their needs.
- **Kill the squirrels by following the logic**
 - Often we go to our darkest most feared thoughts during and after an argument. We create stories of sabotage and abandonment and link them perfectly (in our heads) to the argument and partner’s behaviors. Fears of abandonment, being too much, and the ulterior motives of our partner start spinning in our head like a squirrel chasing its own tail. You can stop this with just a few questions that challenge your squirrels. Ask yourself:
 - Is this true? How do I know it’s true?
 - What would happen if the worst happened? Would I survive?
 - Would he/she be fighting with me if they didn’t want to resolve and stay?
 - Other than today, does this person show they are on my team?
 - Is this about my past experiences or is this really about him/her?
 - If you see your partner is starting to chase squirrels and can’t get out of their own thinking, perhaps ask some of the above questions. It might help break the destructive thinking cycle.
 - Follow the logic and don’t base an entire relationship on a single argument. It’s hard to do if you have trust issues, however, what do you have to lose by accepting and giving trust? Absolutely nothing. You’ve been hurt before and you came through that.

You may have to practice these exercises a few times to get it right, but just the willingness to use tools is an opportunity to change your fighting styles and give honor and respect to your partner.