

Married Couple's Communication / Conflict Resolution

"Suggestions for developing balance and wholeness in your work and in your family"¹

1. **Be There** – be present to the task at hand, if at home or at work. Be present to spouse and children.
2. **Mutual Respect** – ‘Golden Rule’ ... “respect is contagious” ... “Change first principle”: “I will not wait for you to change. I will change first.”
3. **Trust** – both family and coworkers ... give plenty of second chances ... don't be easily discouraged by others
4. **Maintain a sense of humor** – don't let yourself get easily “bent out of shape” ... There is humor in most situations, and most situations are not “life or death.”
5. **Be truthful** – “Honesty is *still* the best policy” ... Easier not to have to remember what you said if it is not the truth
6. **Be appreciative** – criticism received better when immersed in a “steady diet” of “applause”
7. **Keep your priority relationships current** – “keep your valued relationships growing”... Be realistic about relationships that change after your marriage / new stages of life
8. **Be consistent in your faith** – spiritual health = essential to being WHOLE and WELL

"4 Ways to Sabotage a Marriage"²

Definition of “Sabotage”³ =

Noun:

1. Destruction of property or obstruction of normal operations, as by civilians or enemy agents in time of war.
2. Treacherous action to defeat or hinder a cause or an endeavor; deliberate subversion.

Sabotage #1 – *Abbreviate your communications*

- “Problems of poor communication” are usually present in the relationship *before* marriage
- “Abbreviating” = withholding feelings and thoughts ‘distorts the truth,’ often with the best of intentions
- Negative Result: Alternative behavior / “acting out” chosen over direct confrontation of issue = implied message of ‘acting out’ is then lost on partner
- Bottomline: **“Just tell it like it is.”**

Sabotage #2 – *Keep track of your mate's faults in case you want to fight dirty*

- Building up “resentments” / “laundry list,” versus “overlooking shortcomings”
- “insurance or ammunition” = “cash in” and “unload” at time of argument
- “spouses can be made to feel like they have criminal records” / with “regular reminders”

¹ Wood, Britton, and Bobbye Wood, “Caring for Family and Work with Balance and Wholeness” *Couple's Connection*, Minneapolis: Family Information Services (November 2000) 31-33. Past president-couple of the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (A.C.M.E.), an international nonprofit organization, which encourages healthy marital relationships. More Information at bettermarriages.org.

² Rosen-Grandon, Jane, PhD., “Four Ways to Sabotage a Marriage.” *Couple's Connection*. Minneapolis: Family Information Services (November 2000) 34 – 35.

³ “Sabotage” Yahoo! Education. <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/sabotage> (March 17, 2005)

- Bottomline: **“Like in court, if an issue has already been resolved, it should not be admissible as evidence.”**

Sabotage #3 – *Withhold sex and love*

- Instruments of “rewards and punishments” / “conditions for receiving ... are rarely clear, making it impossible to succeed.”
- Love-making should serve as “bridge”
- Bottomline: **“Making love does much to restore and maintain a marriage.”**

Sabotage #4 – *Grow old before your time*

- ‘Seven year itch’ is real / birth of a second child can present equivalent issues
- Partner #1 = experiences sense “of growing apart” = discomfort with constraints, loss of identity, mellowing of early stage “fun” in marriage
- Partner #2 [reaction to #1]= “Sense of abandonment, the lack of equal responsibility, and be outraged by mates immaturity”
- Roles may switch at different times = tension between fading youth and adult search for stability
- Bottomline: **“The truth is, every relationship needs maintenance and improvement on a regular basis.”**

“How to Fight Fairly in Your Marriage”⁴

“The way a married couple fights can often tell psychologists more than what they fight about. If done correctly, conflict and healthy, fair fighting, can strengthen a marriage.”

Here's How:

1. Don't let little things that bother you build up until one of you explodes the issue into a large fight.
2. If you are angry about something and don't try to talk about it with your spouse within 48 hours, let it go.
3. If your spouse doesn't want to discuss the matter, set an appointment within the next 24 hours.
4. Know what the issue is. Then, both of you stick to the subject.
5. Keep your fight between the two of you. Don't bring in third parties like your mother-in-law or his best friend.
6. Don't hit below the belt. **[No cheap shots]**
7. Don't bring up past history.
8. No name calling. Even endearing terms and pet names can be hurtful when you are using a sarcastic tone.
9. Be careful how you use humor. Laughter is good, but teasing can be misinterpreted and can be hurtful.
10. Listen to one another fully while you fight. This includes watching body language. Look at one another while you speak.
11. Don't interrupt during your fight.
12. Don't blame one another and don't make accusations.

⁴ Sheri & Bob Stritof, “How To Fight Fairly in Your Marriage.” *Your Guide to Marriage*.
<http://marriage.about.com/cs/conflictandanger/ht/fightfair.htm> (March 17, 2005).

13. Try to use 'I' sentences instead of 'you' sentences.
14. If the two of you aren't extremely angry, try to hold hands while talking during your fight.
15. Be open to asking for forgiveness and being willing to forgive.

Tips:

1. Even though it may be hard to forgive your spouse, not forgiving can cause more harm both emotionally and physically to yourself and to your marriage. Holding a grudge is letting someone else live in your head rent free.
2. Remember to not fight to win, but to fight for your relationship.
3. Conflict is not the problem. All married couples have disagreements. It's not knowing how to effectively argue that creates difficulty in a marriage.

What You Need:

- Conflict management skills
- A sense of fairness
- Putting marriage first
- Willingness to forgive
- Ability to listen

“Making Marriage Work by Fighting Fairly”⁵

“Some couples claim that they never argue. That's next to impossible in marriages where both partners feel free to express their differences. Other couples have frequent arguments that sometimes get very loud. However, the volume and frequency of fights aren't very telling — nor are the issues that a couple fights about. The most important question is: Are the fights fair?”

“In marriage, you and your spouse have to referee your own disputes without help from a third party, so you need to hammer out rules and limits that work for you. The two of you can set flexible boundaries that suit your individual personalities and your marriage — as long as you follow the rules of fair fighting.”

Understand what's really going on

“Different strategies are effective for handling different kinds of arguments ... When you sense that a fight is about to erupt between you and your partner, try to scope out the underlying cause of the argument:

- “Are you or your spouse just letting off steam?” If so, “it's sometimes a good idea to say nothing and let him or her cool down.”
- “Is there something specific that you want your partner to do?” If so, “a direct approach often works best.”
- “Are your angry words an expression of serious differences or conflict in your marriage?” If so, “consider seeking out professional help.”

⁵ Simring, Steven, Sue Klavans Simring, and Gene Busnar, “Making Marriage Work by Fighting Fairly.” Adapted From: [Making Marriage Work For Dummies](http://www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-2150,subcat-FAMILY.html) Wiley Publishing, 1999. <http://www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-2150,subcat-FAMILY.html> (March 17, 2005).

Stick to the issues

“You're more likely to get your partner to see things your way if you avoid personal attacks and concentrate on what you're trying to accomplish. For example, if you're upset because your wife is late, don't say, ‘You have absolutely no consideration for other people.’ Instead, try saying: ‘I feel more relaxed and have a much better time when we get to places a few minutes early. Can we do it that way next time?’ Your partner is likely to respond to your needs if she doesn't feel attacked and forced to defend herself.”

Look for ways to bend without breaking

“In a successful marriage, both partners must be able to compromise and negotiate. Sometimes, the two of you can find a middle ground. If, for example, you want to spend your two-week summer vacation at the shore and he wants to spend it at a resort with a golf course, you can work it out in several different ways:

- You can both spend a week at the shore, then a week at the resort.
- You can each spend a portion of your vacation time apart.
- You can agree to go to the shore this summer, and to the golf resort next summer.

“Figure out what's at stake for each of you — and defer to the partner whose needs are stronger. For example, if your wife has had a particularly stressful year and you know that she finds spending time near the ocean relaxing, consider taking the kind of vacation she wants this summer.

“In the long run, it's most important that the outcome of your disagreement doesn't leave one of you feeling like a loser. If you yield on an issue that's important to your partner, it's likely that your partner will do the same for you on another occasion.”

Use strategic timing

“Be sensitive to your partner's shifting moods. Is your husband rushed and frazzled most mornings? If so, don't raise difficult issues when you wake up, especially if they're going to require a long discussion. Instead, pick a time when he seems more relaxed and positively disposed.

“Timing your request doesn't mean that you're walking on eggshells or that you're afraid to speak. It simply means that if your partner is in a negative frame of mind, he may say no to something that he'd agree to at another time.”

Don't garbage-bag

“When people get into an argument, they often start with one issue, segue into another, and wind up throwing in everything but the kitchen sink. They then bring up a host of past grudges and resentments.

“Discuss only one issue at a time. If you're arguing about household finances, don't throw up her tendency to be late, or that he burned the chicken when preparing last night's dinner. When you do that, you're sure to wind up fighting about personalities — not issues.

“Don't try to fix your partner. Marital arguments often give husbands and wives an excuse to practice a little dime-store psychology. Someone will say things like, ‘The problem is that you're just like your mother,’ or, ‘We're not going to get anywhere until you get over your neurosis.’ Your spouse needs to feel loved and respected for who he or she is!”