

WHY CONFLICT CAN BE GOOD FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP!

Most people don't enjoy conflict and arguing, and many view it as an indication of a toxic relationship. Yet, conflict and disagreement are a necessary part of a healthy relationship. Obviously, it depends on the manner in which couples fight. Yelling, screaming, and name calling are not a healthy way to proceed through a conflict.

Michael Batshaw, author of 51 Things You Should Know Before Getting Married, says 'Engaging in conflict isn't going to end the relationship, it's avoiding the conflict that might.' There are many reasons why people avoid conflict in a relationship, some relate to their childhood experiences of seeing the damage that is caused through observing their parents arguing, for others it may relate to self-esteem issues where they feel that their opinions have no value and therefore do not stand up for their points of view, but what is the cost to our mental health and the relationship's health? The problem with ignoring issues or stifling hurt feelings is that they never really go away. Instead, they usually just turn into bigger issues. In my years of work with couples I have found that if you don't address the small issues in your relationship, they just evolve into a bigger problem that then becomes really hard to unpack.

Alternatively, being able to discuss small issues helps address the larger issues that are likely to occur somewhere down the road. I have previously referenced renowned relationship expert John

Gottman on this matter and he says that how often a couple fights is not the determining factor in the success of the marriage, but rather how one fights. Respect turns out to be the defining variable, which means as long as couples respect each other during a conflict, fighting is not a threat to the relationship. How one fights and how a couple resolves conflict determines the health of a relationship.

Here are four other ways that conflict can be good for your relationship:

It increases trust. Constructive disagreements that respect boundaries but allow both individuals to express themselves can strengthen the relationship and coming through the other side of the argument can increase trust. Knowing that you can argue and have conflict and still be 'okay' makes conflict less threatening.

You will feel better. Expressing your emotions eases anxiety, tension and fear. Some people describe it as 'a weight being lifted off of their shoulders'. Not only does it make you feel better, it's also much healthier for you physically.

Opportunity for intimacy increases. When your partner fully knows your thoughts, feelings and opinions, where your boundaries are, and what hurts you, this typically breeds a deeper level of intimacy and appreciation. Enduring conflict can also be a growth process in which you increase your own self-understanding, in addition to the understanding of your partner.

It improves your character. If you use conflict as a growth process, it can help you increase patience, self-esteem, care and love, helping you focus on what's really important. And what's really important is the happiness and health of your relationship and your partner, as well as yourself.

Although it's easier said than done, conflict is an opportunity to find a greater love and understanding for your partner. Remembering that in the heat of the moment and using good conflict resolution skills can be the hard part! But if you want a greater understanding of yourself and your partner, it is important to successfully navigate a conflict and manage strife in your relationship.



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