

Arguments and Good Communications

Arguments are not always a bad thing. The problem is *how* you argue. Is it respectful, or is it point-scoring? Does it stick to the subject under discussion, or does it fly all over the place? Do past hurts and “old stuff” get brought back up?

John Gottman’s research says that most of things that couples argue about are problems that **cannot** really be resolved. That makes sense to me, because if there was an easy solution, you’d have already figured it out by now.

If you’re arguing about small things – how to load the dishwasher, how to fold the towels, what to eat – I can hardly do better than quote a few of Gottman’s words: “whether the issue is momentous... or ridiculous... gridlock is a sign that you have dreams for your life that aren’t being addressed or respected by each other”. This is from his book “*The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*”, which is excellent on the subject of arguments.

So let’s find out what your hopes and dreams, and your partner’s, really are. This is the key to a good relationship. It’s not about the dishwasher – it’s about mutual respect.

In the mean-time, you can learn to communicate more respectfully, by

- Agreeing what the topic is, and then sticking to it.
- Talking at a mutually agreed time, with a time limit.
- Talking about yourself, how you feel, and what you want. **Not** about your partner, what they said or did, or what you imagine is going on with them.
- Conceding any point that you possibly can. If your partner says something valid, then immediately say so, even if you disagreed with most of what they said. Look for *something* you can *agree* with.
- Saying what you really mean. No sarcasm, no point-scoring. No manipulation.
- Being curious about your partner’s point of view.
- Not competing over who has it worse.
- Agreeing that either of you can call a time-out if things get heated.
- Making sure you know what *you* are trying to achieve: agreement for the future – not punishing your partner for what already happened.
- Not using the above “rules” to criticise your partner. Use them for yourself.

But maybe that all sounds impossible to you? You have arguments that erupt in an instant, not at a “mutually agreed time”. Things go from zero to nuclear in a flash?

The problem is that none of the above techniques will work well unless there is already some mutual goodwill. All the above ideas can be misused by someone if they are determined to “win” the argument. Forget about winning the argument.

Let’s sit down together, agree to talk politely, and figure out what the issue between you really is.

Note: if your arguments become physically violent – you **must** stop, and leave the scene for a timeout, even if it means “losing” the argument. And you must seek help.