

Sticks and Stones

Why Fighting Hurts

By Andrew Logan

> **In every relationship**, disagreements are inevitable but fighting is *not* communicating and rarely resolves anything. When we fight, we are playing offense and defense. We are not listening. If we aren't listening, are we really communicating? Fighting, on a regular basis, is only a sign that help is needed.

Communicating with your spouse

Many couples will recount the terrible fights they have had and the awful things they've said. It surprises people to hear that these horrible statements are not all that relevant to their therapy. The point of fighting is to win—at almost any cost.

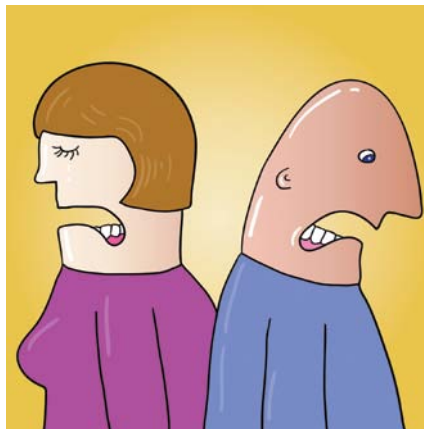
One goal in improving dysfunctional relationships is to remain calm by avoiding escalating arguments. The emphasis should be on feelings, as they are always paramount. If couples genuinely care for each other, they will hear when their partner has hurt feelings and will respond accordingly. Almost always, miscommunication is at the heart of a disagreement. If a couple learns to head off arguments before someone gets defensive and hurtful, there is a good chance for reconciliation.

After the joining has occurred, couples can explain their feelings as to why they acted the way they did. When they slow things down, they will almost always find miscommunication is at the heart of a disagreement. If a couple learns to head off arguments before someone gets defensive and hurtful, there is a good chance for reconciliation.

One key element impacting the odds of reconciliation is time. When arguments persist, they begin to take a toll on the empathy felt for our loved ones, especially in couples. It is difficult to be empathic towards a person who regularly

hurts you. When people stop caring about hurting each other, this can lead to a permanent rift. These things do not get better over time.

Avoiding the issue always makes it worse. These problems can lead to personal rifts, expensive divorces and eventual physical health issues. If there is a communication breakdown, seek professional help immediately and obtain the tools to learn how to navigate the stormy seas.



Communicating with your Kids

Many parents come to a psychotherapist because a child is acting out, either at school, at home or both. There are limited cases where organic issues are at play, but the majority of cases involve problems in the family system. Children tend to become more difficult when there are stressors in the home. When kids act out, they are communicating. They are asking for love, attention or requesting help for managing intense feelings about a chronic problem.

Our familial patterns have been shaped for generations. Thankfully, they are usually improved upon over time. Most of us were raised with parents who said things like, “Children are to be seen and not heard.” These scare tactics may have been effective in the short-term, however, they often led to rebellious adolescent behaviors and even rifts that many experience for the rest of their lives. More recently, many parents' response to their own experience of authoritarian styles of parenting has led them to go in the opposite direction and become permissive with their own children.

The best forms of communication are respectful and behavioral. What we do has a much greater impact over what we say. As a result, most discipline theories support implementing a system of rewards and consequences in the home.

When a child asks why he or she cannot watch a video after hitting a sibling, do not say “Because I said so” as our parents might have said. That is disrespectful and teaches children to abuse power which often comes back to haunt us during the teenage years. Instead, calmly tell them, “It’s a bummer you can’t have screen time today because you hit your brother. I’m sure you will remember to stay in control tomorrow.”

Empathic communication and joining are some of the key skills to avoid escalating arguments that erode your relationships, both with adults and children. Effectively implementing a system of sympathetic statements and consequences will be your best communication tool with your children. When arguments become the norm, it is time to stop avoiding the issue and seek help. •

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