

Relationships - dealing with conflict

With the physical and emotional closeness of a partnership, it is inevitable that there is sometimes conflict. It can be a sign that something is wrong or that someone is unhappy. Avoiding conflict or ignoring the problems could mean that you are choosing to avoid talking through important issues or exploring the underlying reasons that have caused the conflict.

Conflict creates frustration and anger

Frustration and anger are feelings that often accompany conflict situations. When you feel frustrated or angry, you might:

- Express your feelings through a physical or verbal outburst. This might make you feel better at first, but you will probably feel guilty later. This can damage the relationship, especially if your partner is afraid of your anger.
- Deny your anger. Ignoring anger from conflict means ignoring the signs that something is wrong in the relationship. This may solve the problem for a while but it creates greater problems in the future.
- Acknowledge your anger (without trying to hurt the other person either emotionally or physically). This is the most constructive response to anger and is more likely to lead to a positive resolution.
-
- Physical or emotional outbursts are abusive behaviour and not acceptable. If you are experiencing abuse in your relationship, seek help. Family violence interventions include services to help with violence or abuse issues in relationships, including counselling for couples at risk of violence, assistance to secure the safety of victims of family violence, and therapy for those who use abuse and violence, such as:
 - National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service 1800 RESPECT (200 526)
 - WIRE Free information, support and referrals for women Tel. 1300 134 130

Work through the issues

When you choose to acknowledge your feelings, you can then take steps to resolve the problem as quickly and calmly as possible:

- Admit that you are angry and let your partner know how you feel by bringing the problem out into the open (without trying to hurt them).
- Give yourself 'cooling off' time if you feel that you or your partner is too angry to talk about the problem. Remember to come back to the issue later and try to sort things out.
- Explore your true feelings. Conflict is usually the end result of a build up of underlying feelings and unresolved issues.
- Listen to your partner's point of view. There are two sides to every story.
- Acknowledge and take responsibility for your part in the problem.

It is also important to reflect together on what you can learn from conflict. This helps to strengthen your relationship and lessen the chances of a similar conflict happening again.

Be prepared to forgive

When you have resolved the conflict, be prepared to forgive and make up with your partner. Let them know that you are ready to put it behind you and move on. Often this can lead to a deepening of understanding and intimacy in a relationship.

Where to get help

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors Tel. 1800 806 054
- Relationships Australia Tel. 1300 364 277
- Family Relationship Advice Line Tel. 1800 050 321
- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service 1800 RESPECT (200 526)
- WIRE Free information, support and referrals for women Tel. 1300 134 130

Things to remember

- Conflict is an inevitable part of any relationship.
- Ignoring anger from conflict means ignoring the signs that something is not right in the relationship.
- Aim to acknowledge and deal with your anger in a constructive way.
- If you are experiencing abuse or violence, seek help immediately.
- Avoid actions or words that may hurt your partner.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Relationships Australia Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.