

Arguing as a couple:

Many couples engage in persistent arguing. Either they bicker very frequently about a lot of 'little things' or they have big arguments but less often. In both instances, though the arguments are persistent and regular enough to create problems and tensions at home. Either way, it is important to try to find the underlying cause of these fights and to understand what is at stake.

There is a saying, "You're never fighting for the reason you think". It may look like you are fighting about money, tidiness, responsibility, or something specific, but there is usually some vague feeling underneath that has not been expressed fully. It might stem from being hurt on previous occasions, a lack of trust in your partner, or even childhood experiences. Identifying the root feeling can help with calming down. Some common feelings that many fights can be traced to are inadequacy, trust, vulnerability, abandonment fears, or feeling insignificant.

If the issues have to do with inadequacy you or your partner may just not feel that you are good enough. If you feel this way, you may overreact to criticism by being defensive or, the other extreme, self-doubting. Either way, a disagreement can evoke feelings that are disproportionately intense for the issue at hand. You may find yourself saying to your partner "Nothing I even do is good enough" or you may feel crushed by their comments.

Alternatively, an argument may be about trust. In other words, you feel that your partner's behaviour or comments indicate that he does not trust you and feels he has to monitor you in some way. You may have issues of trust and find yourself always asking him to prove himself to you because, deep down, you do not quite believe that he will come through.

What you have to learn in such situations is to try to communicate what is most true for you in a couple of sentences. Letting your partner know what may be beneath the complaint you have. This is not easy, but it is worth the effort. Even if you do not solve your problem, it is important to express the source of the problem. "When you say these things to me I feel like I am a failure and that in your eyes I am not good enough. I know I over react, I know I get very upset, but it touches this nerve in me all the time. While you trigger it, you are not to blame for all my anger". This comes closer to the truth than

This kind of response shows that you can take responsibility. Did you snap at your mate? Are you trying to control the outcome? Is it easier to get what you want by manipulating the situation rather than simply asking directly? We all do these things to one degree or another. If you can find a way to own up to your part in the argument, without trying to blame or wrong yourself or your partner for it, it may just open up a complete new dialog. Be Humble. Sometimes if you can apologise for something you did (even if you did not start it), it can disarm your partner, and result in their apologizing as well. Something like, "Wait a minute. This is not where I wanted this to go, and I am so sorry it has. I do not want us both to be so upset we cannot even talk. Can we take a breather from the disagreement, collect ourselves and try again, only this time less angry?"

Wanting to be right in an argument is the surest way to keep it going. People will argue about who is right and who is wrong for years if they do not decide to do something

else with their energy. It is a no-win situation and keeps you from truly connecting with your partner. There is an old saying: "Would you rather be right, or be happy?" Apologising does not mean that you are objectively wrong, it just means that you value your relationship more than being right.

You can only control yourself, and your own pace of learning. If your partner is not getting it, you cannot force them to see what this issue might be about for them. You can only see what it is about for you. There is information in any argument for both of you, but it is impossible to *make* someone see things from your point of view. They either do, or do not. Moreover, if they don't, you can either accept that, and learn to deal with it, or don't. However, if you don't, the argument(s) will continue.

If you are holding out for an apology, and your partner is not giving it, consider openly forgiving them anyway. This kind of acceptance, if you do not do it in a condescending way, might show your partner that you accept their imperfections, which can help them stop trying so hard to defend their flaws. Example: After succinctly expressing how you feel say, "I know you didn't mean to wind me up by forgetting to clean up the house. I do still feel angry, though, but I am willing to trust that you did not do it on purpose, and maybe you will try to remember my needs the next time. Deal?"

The sooner you two can experience some form of joy and lightheartedness, the better. Successful relationships have a five to one ratio of appreciations to criticisms.^[1] Actions that create a genuine positive feeling will help to replenish the "emotional bank account" of your relationship. After an argument is a great time to re-balance your relationship by noticing and expressing many things that you really like about your partner and yourself, and the way you are together. If you are still feeling down about the whole thing, though, start with yourself.