

Stay Happily Married

A resource for married couples.

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



How to Argue and Stay Married!

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Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

After the honeymoon, when you realize that 50% of all marriages actually do end in divorce, marriage partners begin to realize the enormity of the tasks involved in staying happily married. Positive conflict management becomes a high priority in keeping marriages together. All couples argue, even in successful marriages, but happily married partners learn how to argue, stay best friends, and stay in love.

The overriding principle in managing arguments and conflicts is to make sure that rational thinking prevails and emotions do not run amuck. Visualize a continuum of emotions running from 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest level of anger and dissent ; you should try to keep your arguments/discussions at level 3 where you are engaged in the issues but not so overwhelmed by feelings that rational thinking is impossible. Many couples have learned to agree to schedule a "time out" when emotions run high, with the

withdrawing partner agreeing to schedule "time in" to resolve the problem when both spouses calm down.

The following discussion is organized around the concept of "SOLVE" to emphasize the fact that marital problems can be resolved in an atmosphere of love and respect.

"S" stands for the fact that you should try to schedule discussions of problems when both spouses are calm and focused and willing to discuss the issue. You all probably have experienced the opposite, running out of the door on a tight schedule, when your spouse brings up hot issues which cannot be resolved at the time, and both leave for daily activities feeling upset and angry. Too many of these unsuccessful encounters leave the marriage partners feeling frustrated with a growing number of underlying resentments.

"O" asks the question, what outcome do you really want for yourself and your partner? Pick one issue to discuss at a time, deciding the importance of the issue and whether your proposed solution is reasonable. Too often arguments become confused with a lot of side issues and unresolved problems thrown in, making it impossible to solve anything and again increasing resentments. Also realize that it makes no sense to argue about the past which cannot be changed. So stay focused on the present and future and decide what outcomes would be reasonable for you and your spouse.

"L" stands for listen to your partner until you really understand his or her point of view. What usually happens during an argument is that you never really listen to your partner, instead rehearsing your reply while you wait for your spouse to stop talking. So no one really feels heard and discussions escalate to arguments. If you don't understand your partner's point of view, ask questions until you do. Make sure that you validate your spouse's point of view by showing your understanding of his or her position, even if you then proceed to state a different position on the issue.

"V" stands for verbalize your thoughts, feelings, needs and possible solutions. To keep a discussion positive, use "I" or "we" messages, not "you" messages. An example will illustrate the difference. Let's say your spouse leaves towels, socks etc. on the floor. "You are a slob" is an invitation to a fight; "I get upset when stuff is left on the floor" is less accusatory; "We have a problem keeping our house neat" may lead to a productive discussion. Try to discuss or "brainstorm" many possible solutions to resolve the problem; a solution may emerge as various possibilities are discussed in a calm manner.

"E" calls your attention to the need to evaluate your solutions after you try them out. Good ideas often go by the wayside when they are not discussed. Too often one partner may forget, the other may become resentful that the agreement was not followed, and then both stop implementing the solution. Instead, pick a time to sit down and review marriage issues to make sure that agreements are honored.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? Not so. Actually it's one of the hardest things that we can do, making sure our rational minds control our arguments, not our hot emotions.

Cut out this article and put it on your refrigerator door or other prominent place, so you can refer to it when needed. You can also consult a marriage counselor to help you learn this process and by so doing protect and preserve your marriage. Marriage counseling can help prevent problems as well as save marriages.

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