

Managing Couple Conflict



Recent national and world events such as bushfires, droughts, floods and COVID 19 have challenged couples on many levels. While adversity can bring us together and remind us of our relational strengths, couples who were already experiencing trouble in their relationship could have found even more to argue about. Research tells us that such events can drive couples to separate.

Arguing is not inherently bad. It can be a chance to clear the air, explore differences, name in a more forthright way what you really think, challenge for change, and so on. “Healthy” or “successful” arguing is measured by whether both people feel ok about what happens, both get a chance to speak up, and they ultimately lead to a better outcome.

Unproductive, negative, repetitive and abusive arguments can do enormous harm to a relationship. Such fights leave the couple, or one person in it, feeling despondent, distant, hopeless, blamed, hurt, sad or injured. Sometimes the issues that start the arguments are really ordinary, but it is the style of fighting, or one or both getting triggered and arguing badly that is more of a problem.

If in fact you feel that the arguments have worn you down and have become repetitive, longstanding or are beginning to get worse in their tone or the harm they are causing, we encourage you to seek professional help.

Many well-connected couples, tired of the arguments, can be relieved to develop some new skills to circuit break old habits. Where the arguments are more destructive, the evidence is that this dynamic will not change on its own. Professional help will be required.

Seeing a well-trained couple therapist at Relationships Australia NSW can improve your relationship and close connection. For those experiencing harm, it is important to act early to ensure your relationship is not further eroded.

See next page for some tips to guide you.



Here are some tips to guide you

1

Don't put things off.

The right time to talk about an issue is when it is hanging around in your head and affecting how you feel about or relate to your partner. That said...

2

Choose a time that works for you both.

Ask what will work so that you are both in a good place.

3

Declare your good intentions.

"I want us to be closer..." "I don't want us to fall into bad habits..."

4

Stick to the topic.

Don't start a long list and bring history or friends and family into it.

5

Be self-aware and accountable for your part in the negative cycles.

"I know I get upset..." "I don't handle conflict well..." This offers leadership to your partner to do the same. Offer up what you need to change.

6

Agree in advance to take a break if either of you gets triggered.

Use the short break to calm down; don't ruminate and get your back up further. Come back when agreed, even if you just need to agree to take a longer break.

7

Keep a couple focus.

"I'd like us to be closer, work together better..."; "what can we each do to be different?"

8

Keep the argument contained.

The silent treatment afterwards, or withdrawing physically might be understandable temporarily, but should not linger. It compounds the problem.

If you would like support to get out of conflict, contact RANSW on **1300 364 277** to make an appointment.

1300 364 277

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