

resolving disagreements

Change and conflict are natural components in being together. Cooperation and compromise are what can keep you together. Knowing how to “fight fairly” can bring you closer together.

Here are some tips from couples who resolve conflicts without hurting each other:

- Say what is bothering you by being specific. “I feel upset when this happens . . .”
- Be positive. “I appreciate it when you call if you will be late . . .”
- Listen without comment, defense, or disagreement until your partner is finished talking.
- Discuss details. Avoid old issues.
- Negotiate to agreement even if it is to disagree.
- Be ready to be wrong or equally at fault. This is not a competition.
- Assume your partner wants you to be happy.
- Remember that you want your partner to be happy.
- Try to see things through your partner’s eyes.
- Take a break when the tension gets high.
- Your differences can draw you together or drive you apart, depending on your skill in talking about them.

REMEMBER: Clear communication can be the glue that keeps you growing together instead of apart.

Help is available

Aspirus Employee Assistance Services has counselors available to help you and your family. You can call the confidential helpline 24 hours a day at:

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3000 Westhill Drive, Suite 100
Wausau, WI 54401

715.847.2772

aspirus.org

Talking with
your Partner



resolving disagreements



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Building a good life together is a continuous process. As we move through the stages of our life, our needs often change.

Many issues - money, in-laws, sex, children, drugs and alcohol abuse - may result in communication breakdowns. All of these issues are loaded with strong emotions.

talking to gain understanding

Talking to your partner in an honest, direct way is a challenge. It's easy to fall into speech pattern traps which muddy what you want to communicate. For example, the simple habit of starting a conversation with a "why" question can put your partner on the defensive. Developing a way of talking that expresses your feelings, your needs, and your desire to understand your partner's feelings and needs can be more important than your words. Being aware of body language and other non-verbal messages, your own and your partner's, is crucial to clear understanding.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Be honest and clear. Use "I" messages. Describe what happened and how it affected you (how you felt, what you thought, etc.). Don't blame your partner or tell her what she felt.



- Be aware that you might be misunderstood. Ask your partner what he heard.
- Be open. Your feelings, sincerely expressed without blame, can draw out your partner.
- Be creative. Use humor to tackle tough talk. But avoid sarcasm.
- Be specific. Your partner may not understand. Describe the specific actions desired.
- Be sensitive to reactions. Withdrawal signals tension. Allow space.
- Be expressive when you listen. Use verbal and non-verbal feedback. Show your partner you want to understand.
- Be patient. Interruptions can be irritating. Listen to understand, not to attack.
- Be attentive. Offer reassurance that you are interested. (If not, why not?)
- Be fair. Avoid sore spots that end conversation. Don't take pot-shots.

practice verbal intimacy

Since more time is spent talking than having sex, verbal intimacy is the key to maintaining a satisfying relationship.

Suggestions for enhancing verbal intimacy include:

- Repeat back what is said so you are both clear about the meaning.
- Use "I" instead of "you" to express feelings. Again, describe your reactions to what happened without blaming or attacking.
- Be open, genuine, and honest.
- Listen without giving advice (unless asked for).

Suggestions for enhancing non-verbal intimacy include:

- Use a friendly, soft tone.
- Match expression and gestures to your message
- Be physically close and make eye contact when you talk.