



FAMILY *Matters*

Secrets to a healthier *marriage*

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Is a healthy marriage a relationship without conflict? No, that version would be known as a fantasy. Healthy marriages have conflict and disagreement that are handled in a respectful and reasonable way. Maintaining a healthy marriage takes a lot of work through open and honest communication, working together as a team and accepting each other's influence. Closeness and intimacy are equally important in a healthy marital relationship.

Work demands, finances, child management issues and extended family relationships can create stress and distance in a marriage. However, how you manage these common circumstances, as a couple, influences the quality of your marital and family life. What most people don't realize is that the most intense arguments start with one partner believing that he/she knows the "one right way" to do something and then spends an inordinate amount of time trying to convince their partner that theirs is right and their partner is wrong. This thinking usually results in arguments with diametrically opposed perspectives, that don't get resolved which can produce anger and distance. Dropping the "one right way" belief system allows for more collaborative problem-solving rather than stressful control battles.

When it comes to child management issues, each re-

spective partner's family history can play a role in the conflict. For example, when one parent appears too lenient and the other too harsh, these differences often reflect differences in the way each parent was raised as a child. Parents often recreate or do the opposite of how they were parented depending on how they feel about the effectiveness of the parenting they received as a child. For example, if one parent was frequently yelled at as a child he/she may vow never to yell at his/her own children which may result in a lenient parenting style. When one parent has a lenient style and the other a harsh style conflict will result. Parents could chose to fight about whose way is right or they could find a collaborative compromise approach which would lead to more consistent parenting and reduce parental and parent-child conflict.

Sometimes ineffective communication can lead to disagreement that can create chronic stress in a marital relationship. This tends to be a product of misinterpretations of each other's intentions and poor communication. When a person assumes negative intention in their partner's actions, this often creates a conflict. However, perceptions are often incorrect when emotions are involved. Clarifying each person's true intentions can help soothe the conflict.

So what can couples do to keep the relationship healthy?

- Drop the idea that there is one right way to do something because that is the impetus for most arguments.
- Accept differences in your partner that reflect different life experiences and perspectives.
- Don't assume negative intention by your partner.
- Accept influence from your partner by realizing that each of you have something positive to contribute and that you are stronger as a couple if you see yourselves as collaborators not competitors.
- When there is a conflict, don't blame your partner for your displeasure since your reaction is about your perception of your partner's action and you need to own your reaction.
- Let small conflicts go, not every issue has to be dealt with.
- Support each other's separate and unique interests even if it is not an interest of yours.
- Reach out to each other at least once during the day to simply say "I was thinking about you".
- Make your partner feel special by doing something thoughtful.
- Make regular "date nights"

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