

Saying What you Mean and Meaning What you say: The Importance of Healthy Arguing in Relationships

Arguing is a normal and healthy part of any relationship. When done right, it can strengthen a bond. When done wrong, it can destroy a relationship. Every relationship is unique, but several do's and don'ts can be universally applied.

The Don'ts

1. Don't say "you always"

This implies the other person always does something. No one always does anything. Speaking in absolutes will inevitably put the other person on the defense. Try using "sometimes" or "occasionally" followed by feeling words instead of accusations. Talking in first person instead of finger pointing at your partner will help to decrease the level of hostility during an argument.

2. Don't make assumptions

Many times during an argument, one person may make a statement that is interpreted differently than its intended meaning. Instead of assuming you understand what your partner is inferring, ask them to clarify if a statement seems vague or confusing. Assuming and misinterpreting a statement can lead to another unrelated fight and create more stress in your relationship.

3. Don't threaten to break up

This is one of the biggest damaging actions to a relationship for several reasons. It is often an empty threat or lacking in validity and is said out of frustration. This can show your partner your level of commitment in a relationship. Threatening to break up can also be the beginning of a "crying wolf" situation. The frustrated partner may threaten a break up several times and a person will only tolerate it for so long. Eventually, the person threatening to break up may get it tossed back at them and lose a relationship they truly do value. Threatening to break up also conveys to the other person that they are not in a safe place to express their emotions without feeling, well, threatened. This can cause irreparable damage because it can lead to hiding problems and harboring resentment for one another.

4. Don't cross boundaries

Things that are said can never be unsaid. Sure, we can apologize and forgive, but as much as we sometimes want to, our mind usually does not let us forget. Swearing and taking personal shots at a partner are extremely destructive and can cause permanent damage to a relationship. Saying things that you would not say outside of an argument can be the beginnings of an unhealthy fight. Crossing boundaries too many times can cause any loving relationship to break.

The Do's

1. Argue politely

This may seem like an oxymoron, but it can be done. There are many different arguing styles. The healthiest and most productive arguing style is sometimes termed the validator. The validator respects

and understands what their partner is saying even though they do not agree. This lets the other person know that while you are in disagreement, you still care about their feelings. Using feeling words, clear statements, and letting each individual speak their feelings freely, and in a safe environment, all qualify as arguing politely.

2. Diffuse the situation with humor

Sometimes it is better to laugh about something than to cry about it. Interjecting humor into an argument can put the disagreement in perspective for both people and may help them realize that every argument may not need to be as serious as they make it.

3. Show the other person that you are listening

Many times, when we are arguing with someone, we are hearing what they are saying but we are not really listening. Instead, you are formulating a response to what you perceive they are saying. Instead, try to actively listen and process what the other person is saying. This can be evident in a response but can also be expressed through body language. Body language is sometimes louder than our words. Facing the person, making eye contact, and nodding to acknowledge what they are saying shows the other person that you are listening and processing their feelings.

4. Take a break if needed

The definition of a break here may not be what most people think of when they hear the word ‘break’ with regards to a relationship. This break is characterized by taking a few minutes to calm down and assess the situation without strong negative emotions. This is an ideal time to practice mindfulness exercises in order to facilitate rational thinking and healthy arguing. A break can also mean temporarily tabling the issue and doing something relaxing together until you can both re-approach the topic calmly. Some partners are unable to do this, in which case a few minutes alone to relax and let the negative emotions and anger subside is a good idea.

For a relationship to be successful in the argument department, the topic of healthy arguing must be addressed and agreed upon. This will help to avoid future conflict that could have long-term damaging effects on a relationship. Remember, words and actions can be forgiven, but rarely will they be forgotten.