

FIGHTING FAIR WITH YOUR SPOUSE



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How to Resolve Conflicts in Marriage

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How to Resolve Conflicts in Marriage

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INTRODUCTION

Every relationship has conflict. The closer the relationship, the more certain the tension and the more intense the fights.

Meaning, that you and your spouse are going to butt heads. You're going to argue. You're going to disagree. It's OK.

But there are right ways to fight. And there are wrong ways. Here are some tips on how to manage fights with grace and humility.

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Why Cookies Cause the Most Fights in Marriage

By Tim Parsons



What we're fighting about or what starts the fight isn't usually the cause of the fight.

I get the privilege of meeting with a lot of couples. Some of them are in the process of receiving pre-marital counseling. Others are friends that we're spending some time with.

A few of them attend a marriage class that my wife and I teach. While others are in the midst of crisis.

All of these meetings have a different flavor and feel to them, but there are some commonalities that exist across all of these different conversations.

A Fight About Cookies

Recently, I was meeting with a couple and they shared that they had had a fight recently. I was expecting, as the story unfolded, that this was going to be the kind of fight that would end their relationship.

This was it. Irreconcilable differences.

As I listened on, I was surprised to find out that the fight was about cookies. Cookies! More specifically was that he ate the last cookie and didn't save any for her.

Now, as much as I can relate to someone eating the last cookie and that leading to a massive problem in a marriage that only years of counseling can fix, my first reaction was to tell the couple "If cookies are the worst of your issues, you'll have a long, happy marriage."

I mean, really – cookies?!

I've interacted with couples that are dealing with unfaithfulness, alcoholism, and intimacy issues. But, cookies? That's a new one...

Cookies Aren't Just Cookies

Instead of downplaying their issue, I found myself reflecting on my own marriage. Would Consuela and I fight over cookies? Would it have to be a snickerdoodle or sugar cookie before it would start a fight? Would it matter if they were store-bought or homemade?

And then it hit me.

We do fight over cookies! A lot. In fact, most of the fights we have are over cookies. Confused yet? Let me define "cookies" for you:

- Cookies = Picking where we'll eat for dinner
- Cookies = Changing diapers
- Cookies = Doing the dishes,
- Cookies = Taking out the trash

- Cookies: Running the vacuum
- Cookies = Money, Children, Sex
- Cookies = Anything that causes a fight but isn't the root cause of the argument

Reasons We Fight Over Cookies

What was true about this couple's fight and what is true about most of the fights that me and my wife have. What we're fighting about or what starts the fight isn't usually the cause of the fight.

I would say that there are a few real reasons that couples fight and if we're able to identify this before a fight starts or gets out of control, we can have a happier marriage.

These reasons include:

I'm being selfish.

This is true for husbands and wives alike. We are naturally selfish and we really have to be intentional in our marriage about fight against our selfish tendencies.

- "Those cookies are MINE."
- "I baked those cookies so I get to eat more than you."
- "I have needs, I'm hungry, I haven't eaten all day..."

I think you get the idea. If we are faced with an offense, we should first pause and check our motives. Am I upset because the other person did something worthy of my anger or is it simply a case of where our own selfish wants are not being met?

My love tank is empty.

Most fights happen because of empty love tanks.

- I haven't had any quality time with my spouse.
- I've not heard any words of affirmation for weeks.

- My spouse hasn't served me.
- I've not received any gifts from him/her.
- We haven't touched one another for too long.

You see, when we aren't being "loved," it's much easier for the small things (and big things too) to impact us at a much deeper level.

So, it's not actually cookies that are causing the fights, but rather my need for an encouraging word from my wife about my work or parenting, etc.

Unmet expectations.

Unmet expectations are a real "fight starter" in marriage. When we expect that our spouse will behave in a certain way (thoughtful, caring, etc.), we can be regularly disappointed.

When we expect that our spouse will make a certain decision when faced with particular circumstances (disciplining our children, spending money, eating the last cookie, etc.), we can be hurt by their actual decision.

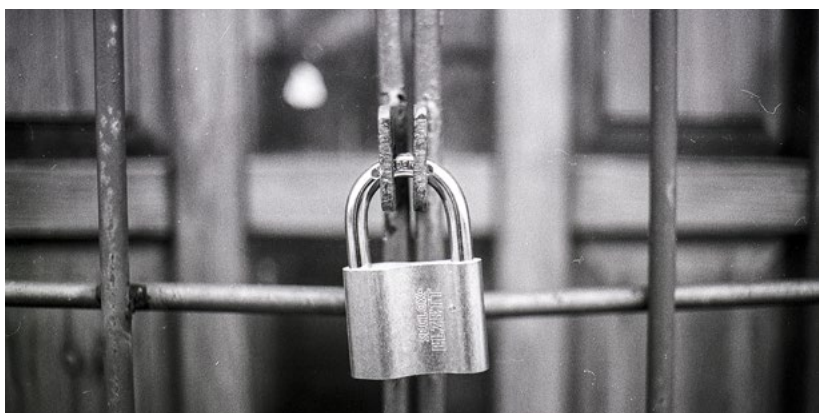
When we expect that a moment (date night, vacation, etc.) will happen in a specific way, we can become disillusioned. Communicating about our expectations can alleviate the need for them to become unmet.

At the end of the day, most of the fights we have could be avoided. If we examine our motives, work diligently on filling each other's love tanks, and communicate regularly about our expectations, we can greatly reduce the impact that eating the last cookie can have on our marriage and our relationship.

In your marriage/relationship, what's your cookie?

The Sneaky Trap That Will Kill Your Marriage

By Shaunti Feldhahn



Men and women are very different and have different insecurities about marriage.

For both men and women, we often completely forget (or brush off altogether) the fact that we are very different, and thus have very different insecurities.

Different doubts, worries, needs, and desires. Which means: things that wouldn't bother us in any way might legitimately hurt our spouse.

Guys, what does this mean for you? Never, ever underestimate your ability to either make your wife feel secure in your love—or very insecure.

I know this sounds odd to you, but even the most confident woman, in a great relationship, has subconscious doubts that you don't usually see.

Women's Hidden Question

Most women (82%) have a deep hidden question. Am I loveable? Am I beautiful? Especially to him? Is he glad he married me?

Although there are exceptions, most men don't have those questions. Once you are married, you probably don't wonder, "Does she love me? Is she glad she married me?"

So you don't realize your wife does have those questions. And you have no idea how easily she can doubt the answers.

Triggering Her Insecurity

Imagine that you are displeased with your wife over something that happened. Maybe she overrode a decision you made about one of the kids. Maybe she did something that made you feel stupid in front of your friends.

It isn't a huge life-altering deal, but it matters to you and you're legitimately upset. So you withdraw.

Maybe it isn't really about her. Maybe you're mostly worrying over some mistakes at work. Maybe you're working lots of extra hours, and are just tired and in a bad mood this week.

Regardless of the situation, you can tell she wants to talk. Or she wants to make up. But you're just not ready. Instead you're withdrawn, silent, maybe angry, maybe sullen and grumpy for a while.

None of what you're doing would particularly hurt, if she was doing it to you. At least that much.

For her, it is excruciating.

Why? Because it is triggering her personal insecurity. Without realizing it—and without intending to—you are answering her hidden questions with a resounding “no.”

What to do? Two things:

1. Don't Assume

You probably assume she knows how much I love her. Don't! She has the “Is he glad he married me?” question every day, so she needs to know the answer through simple words and gestures every day.

2. Realize You're Different

But second, and more to our point here, realize: what wouldn't hurt you much (if at all) legitimately hurts your wife.

So when you're upset, she needs reassurance of your love to diminish that hurt, or avoid it entirely.

Change How You React

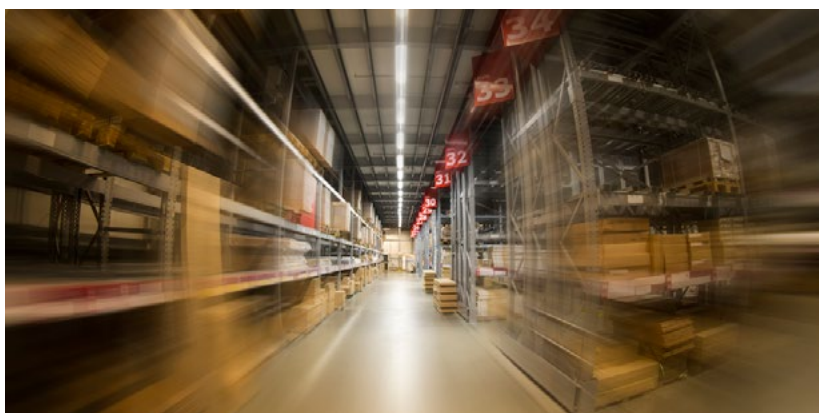
Now, you may or may not be able to immediately change your feelings, or your desire to withdraw. But you can change how you handle it.

This reassurance will go a long way: “I'm upset, I need some space to process this, but I love you and we're okay.” That will tell her that this period of displeasure is not the beginning of things going bad.

Your wife is a smart woman, and she probably knows that logically. But because she is different from you, her heart needs to hear it.

4 Ways Not To Get Into a Fight at IKEA

By Chrystal Chiang



What it is about furniture stores, particularly IKEA, that brings out the worst in couples?

The audience was on their feet. There was celebration. Trumpets. Confetti. The crowd went wild. OK, none of that actually happened.

But that's how it felt the first time my husband and I stepped out of an IKEA store and realized that we had made it through without arguing.

Fighting in Furniture Store

I don't know what it is about furniture stores, and particularly IKEA,

that brings out the worst in couples.

Maybe it's the way our personal style makes everything personal. Maybe it's the fact that it's rare for both people to want to be there in the first place. Or maybe it's just that everything in the store costs money.

Whatever the reason, the struggle is real. Real enough that science has confirmed 17% of couples fight every single time they walk in the doors. (OK, so I made that up, too. But you believed it, right?)

That's why, while we can't promise a perfect IKEA experience, we do want to share a few tricks that have worked for us and helped us keep peace in the store and still speak to each other on the way home.

1. Don't talk about your family

Family is great. And talking about how you were raised is important. Just not at IKEA.

Standing in front of a box with only cartoon pictures and instructions in Swedish isn't the time to bring up that your dad could build anything. Staring at 144 fabric choices isn't the time to mention how much you love your mom's decorating taste.

And if it isn't the best time to bring up your family it probably isn't the best time to bring up flaws you see in your in-laws either. This is about you and your spouse.

If you can get through this together, you can figure out the family stuff later.

2. Say what you mean

You rarely see a couple have an all-out screaming match about couch designs. (I mean, I have, but it's rare.)

What you do see is tense conversations that begin when someone

was misunderstood. It can feel awkward to say “I don’t think we have the money for this” or “I don’t want to put this together.”

But when both partners clearly communicate, it’s easier to let go of confusion and solve the problem together.

3. Know whose house you’re shopping for

If you’re married, then you live in your house (and the your is plural). So the décor won’t exclusively match the style she developed in a single-girl apartment or the items he collected in the bachelor pad.

When you blend two colors together then you almost always get a completely different third color. Your married house is like that—blended.

And it’s helpful to remember that the third style is the one you’re shopping for.

4. Eat something

There has to be a reason they put food by both the entrance and the exit at IKEA. Don’t get hijacked by hangry.

If you’re frustrated, go have a cinnamon roll. They’re delicious. And they’re a good excuse to keep your mouth shut.

4 Questions to Ask When You're In An Argument

By Justin Davis



It is easiest to be the harshest, least patient and most volatile with the people we love the most.

Conflict is a part of every relationship. What I've recognized about myself is that most of my relational regrets have conflict attached to them.

I have been in arguments with my wife. We've both said things we didn't mean. I have talked to my kids in a tone of voice that crushes their spirit. I have been right in principle and sinful in delivery.

There have been arguments that I knew in my heart I was wrong, but I was so committed to winning, I continued to make my point.

It is easiest to be the harshest, least patient and most volatile with the people we love the most. The words we say matter. The words we say and how we say them in conflict will stick with others long after the argument is over.

Here are four questions you can ask yourself to change the way you argue.

1. Is This Really That Big Of A Deal?

How great are we at arguing about things that don't matter?

I've gotten in huge arguments about such small issues. I'm amazed at how many arguments can lose their intensity if I ask, "Is this really that big of a deal?"

Usually the answer is no. At that point, I have to decide if my pride is more important than their heart. That leads into the second question.

2. Do I Care More About This Person Or This Issue?

This question speaks to value. What do I value most?

Do I care more about my wife having time for herself or having dinner ready when I think it should be ready? Do I care more about the money that was spent at Target or the heart of my wife?

It is so easy to place value on the issues and lose sight of the person we say we love.

3. Am I Trying to Be Right Or Do The Right Thing?

When winning an argument becomes my goal, I'll be happy when

they lose. Conflict is always resolved best when two people win.

You can win an argument and lose your husband's heart. You can win an argument and lose your wife's respect. You can win an argument and lose a friend's loyalty.

Being right isn't the same as doing right.

4. Is How I'm Reacting Reflecting My Heart?

Ever give a level 10 response to a level 2 issue? Do you ever scream or cuss or slam doors or walk out of the room talking under your breath?

Your reaction doesn't match your heart. What if you stopped when you're yelling at your child or screaming at your husband or cussing at your friend and asked, "Is how I'm reacting to this reflecting who I want to be?"

You can't behave your way into better relationships. Better relationships come from a transformed heart. Talk about disarming. Talk about attitude shifting.

These questions won't just change your behavior they will begin to help you change your heart toward the people you love the most.

12 Stages Of A Proper Car Fight

By Ryan Frederick



During a fight, it's hard to calibrate yourselves and actually see the situation for what's really going on.

We've all had plenty of fights, especially fights in the car. Whenever my wife and I head out on a road trip, we have to spend the first hour detoxing from latent and yet-to-be-communicated frustrations.

It's become a running joke for my us.

Our longer car rides usually start very pleasant and peaceful, like a pot of water on the stove is cool when you first turn the burner on. However, it's only a matter of time before the pot begins to simmer, steam and boil!

During a fight, it's hard to calibrate yourselves and actually see the situation for what's really going on.

Proper Stages of A Car Fight

If you're going to have a car fight, you might as well do it right! Speaking from experience, here's how to properly progress through a well rounded automobile bout:

1. Start the car ride pleasantly. This is critical to make sure the neither of you see it coming and can react as defensively as possible.
2. One person says something puzzlingly, irritating or jabby.
3. Other person reacts defensively and retaliate with that customized inflammatory tone.
4. Each party, increase vocal volume.
5. Bring up every frustration you've ever had and use as many absolute statements as you can muster. Like you always do this, you never do that, etc.
6. Shout said frustrations as loudly as is necessary to be heard. Pro-tip: shout OVER the other person if they're also shouting. See step #4.
7. When you've run out of things to shout, or you're intellectually bested by some superiorly crafted logic string begin the Silent phase.
8. Remain Silent until your anger subsides or you think your point has been made.
9. During said Silent phase, pray and reluctantly let the Holy Spirit convict you.
10. Swallow your pride. A few times if necessary.
11. Apologize and make up.
12. Laugh, sing, and have fun until you arrive at your desired destination, knowing you've successfully completed a car fight

The Big Idea is Reconciliation

Yes, it's fun to poke at ourselves. But I'd be remiss if I didn't point out the importance of phases 9-12 above.

We have to be willing to let the Holy Spirit convict us and help us truly reconcile the situation. Sometimes our pride keeps us from doing this, but it's absolutely critical to bring things full circle.

Remember, the goal of virtually every personal conflict is godly reconciliation. In marriage, and in life, winning a fight is never decided by who is right, it's decided by whether or not you were reconciled.

So, next time you find yourself in a full-blown automotive shout-fest, remember these 12 Easy Steps for a Proper Car Fight. And you too can be a proud finisher of a healthy car fight.

4 Benefits of Humility Within Marriage

By James Willoughby



“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.” Proverbs 11:2

I have been married nearly 16 years. About halfway into these 16 years, my marriage nearly ended. My wife and I nearly called it quits and almost became a statistic.

I’ve never been one to do the expected thing. So instead of taking the easy path, writing each other off and seeking a fresh start, we began a difficult journey.

The Rocky Road to Humility

The road we chose is a painful one. It is fraught with hard truths

about our each other and about ourselves.

This journey requires forgiveness, grace, patience, honesty and humility. I want to focus on that last trait humility because I believe it is the foundation upon which successful marriages are built.

As I've traveled this narrow path, I keep being brought back to humility, and I keep realizing that the issues I have in my marriage occur when I am lacking in this quality.

Humility is a lofty term and sometimes difficult to translate into practical actions. But, I'm a practical guy who needs things spelled out for me. So here are four ways that humility has helped my marriage.

Time

I have precious few hours each evening and weekend outside of work. And I usually have a list of 20 things that I want to get done during those times.

Being humble with my time means that my list takes a back seat to the needs my family.

Where I invest my time reveals what matters most to me. So Jody and I deliberately set aside every Tuesday night to connect with each other.

We don't only connect on Tuesdays, but budgeting one night a week for our marriage assigns importance and ensures other things don't cut into that time.

Conflict

As much as we've grown in this area, conflict still sometimes rears its ugly head. But we've learned to navigate these tough times more effectively.

Applying humility in conflict means that I don't have to have the last word. I also realistically assess my role in the disagreement—what

could I have done differently? And I try to be the first one to apologize and own my junk.

Meeting Needs

This area is especially challenging, because Jody and I have needs that directly conflict with one another. I am an introvert and have a need for peace and quiet, while Jody has a strong need for my verbal affirmation.

Being humble in this area means that I am making a conscious effort to understand her needs and to balance those needs with my own. I am striving to be a better communicator in my marriage despite my natural tendency towards quiet solitude.

Growth

To evolve into a better version of me, I have to realistically assess my weaknesses. If Jody points out an area of growth, I don't pridefully snap back at her, but I humbly seek the truth.

And if the truth is that I am weak in an area, then I work to shore up that area. Being married 16 years, I've had numerous weaknesses exposed. While I haven't addressed them all, I continuously work on growing.

Showing a humble heart to my wife has made all the difference in my marriage. I'm still a very flawed man and husband. I don't have all of the above areas figured out, but demonstrating my willingness to grow and to meet the needs of my wife and kids is more important than putting on a façade of perfection.

How to Handle An Argument in Public

By Meygan Caston



Whether it's around strangers or friends, no one wants to see a couple fight in public.

A few weeks ago, we took our kids to the fair, like we do every year. We go for the rides, the exhibits, the games, and deep-fried Oreos.

We tried our hardest to ignore the heat, the inappropriate outfits the teenagers wear, the long lines, and the prices.

We had only been there an hour. We were trying to find our way to the butterfly exhibit when, all of a sudden, it happened. A miscommunication and a fight in public, at the fair, with tons of strangers watching us.

This is how it went down

Our seven-year-old daughter kept walking in front of the stroller. She stepped in front of it, Casey pushed her out of the way so she wouldn't get run over.

To me it looked like he purposefully pushed her. He got mad at Kylie, she got mad at him. I assumed he pushed her, and it all blew up from there.

We literally stopped in the middle of the fair and hashed it out for almost 15 minutes until we sorted it all out.

Casey felt accused. Our daughter Kylie was angry. I just wanted everyone to speak in love to each other rather than be angry and cause a scene.

Have you been there before?

A fight in public, or maybe in front of family or friends in someone else's home? We have dozens of times.

It makes you feel frustrated and restricted because you can't completely lose it in front of others even though you feel like you want to pull your hair out and kill your spouse.

It can also make the people around you feel very awkward and nervous.

Learn how to STOP

The first thing to keep in mind is to S.T.O.P., which stands for See The Other People. Be considerate and go somewhere else so they don't have to be subjected to your arguing and fighting.

Whether it's around strangers or friends, no one wants to see a couple fight.

Get Out Of The Environment

You'll never be able to solve the issue in that environment anyway. The awkwardness of it will only escalate the problem.

If you can't leave right away, then pause the conversation until you get home. A little break might even be best for you both to wind down and check to see what the root of the issue really is.

If the issue absolutely cannot wait another second, excuse yourself or find a quiet area and discuss it. Keep calm. Don't name call or use dramatic hand gestures that might draw attention from others.

Try to keep the conversation to no more than five minutes and remind each other you love one another and will work it out once you get home.

Arguing in public is bound to happen to all married couples, so be prepared ahead of time by being on the same page with how to handle the situation.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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James Willoughby has been married to his wife Jody for 16 years, and they are the parents of two children.

James works in the auto industry and in his spare time writes about his adventures in marriage and parenting. -James and Jody are active in their church's (Ginghamsburg) marriage ministry.

CASEY & MEYGAN CASTON

Casey and Meygan Caston are the founders of Marriage365, and the authors of Naked Dinners and Communication That Connects.

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