

The Benefits of Arguing

Although often feared, arguing can be beneficial to relationships.

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Conflict Matters

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Conflict and arguments are often seen as negative and things to be avoided. Many people see conflict as reflective of a “crack” in a relationship or a sign that a relationship is in trouble.

Yet research suggests that the process of conflict and arguing facilitates talk and awareness of another's perspective. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that conflict and arguing can be very beneficial to the health of friendships and romantic relationships.

In particular, facing the need to argue with a close other can be energizing and motivating—the topics that bring about arguments remind us of what is important to us, from our core values to our goals for a given day. Arguments also give us the opportunity to think about and voice how we feel about our relationships and “who we are” as friends or dating partners.



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So the first tip is to remember that conflict should not be seen as a threat—rather, it is an event that can help your relationship evolve and grow and help you get to know your partner better.

You can also learn about yourself in the process. The second tip is that it's important to recognize when you are “ready” to argue. One of the biggest mistakes that friends and couples face is arguing when emotions are too raw or if they are not open to listening to the other person’s side of an issue. Listening does not mean acceptance—listening means that you are available to understand a partner’s perspective. Therefore, it may not be the best time to have an argument as soon as an issue comes up if you know that you are not going to be your most rational self. Schedule a time when you can both focus on the issue at hand without letting emotions or other distractions get in the way.

The third tip is to be flexible during an argument. A lot of us go into conflicts or arguments with expectations about how things “should” turn out. But the exciting dynamic of communication is that our partners have the power to change our opinions or attitudes. And we should be open to change based on learning about a partner’s view of a situation. This does not mean that we should always bend to the will of another, but rather, we should be open to the possibility that changing our position is okay.

The fourth tip is to remember that we are all vulnerable. Even if a close relationship partner acts like he or she knows it all, we all question ourselves at times. We all have experiences that influence the way

we approach arguments. But we should also be open to changing the way we do things.

If we change ourselves, our partners will be more likely to change as well.



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Yet while we may recognize that we are vulnerable (even it is just to ourselves), it can be even more difficult to remember that our partners act out of vulnerability too. We often expect our partners to be “all-knowing” or “perfect” in ways that we know we cannot achieve.

On the flip side, we sometimes think that partners “just don’t get it” or are acting like “just a typical man/woman.” It is easy to make snap judgments about what a partner “should” know. But an important part of effectively managing arguments is to take time to think about and appreciate a partner’s perspective.

No matter what your assumptions, it is important to stop and think about your needs, a partner's needs, and what you need together to keep your friendship or romantic relationship alive.

References

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