

## Relationship Difficulties Information Sheet



The most common things couples fight about are house work, money, sex, parenting, relatives or friends. Why can't couples just discuss these matters without all the frustration and blame? Because the issues have gone on too long without resolution or are the tip of the iceberg of what's bothering them. Over time, couples interact in ways that become habitual patterns which apparently haven't worked to solve the problems between them. Instead of changing how they interact, they escalate their arguments with more and more

negative emotion, more recrimination and blame, more frustration and hurt. This means they each listen less and less to what's said rather than how it's said. They react to how statements are made and the arguments escalate into making demands of one another or shutting down rather than working together to make the home a sanctuary for both. Bottom line propositions partners hear from each other: "you don't love me" and "you're never satisfied". This can lead to personal realisations such as "I don't matter, I'm not loveable, I'm no good" which is devastating and needs to be railed against. It adds fuel to the fire of rage against your partner and it explains why we can become childish with our anger. It really does feel like a matter of life and death in those moments. Remember you are in this together and the way to re-establish ease between you is to do it together. If you cop out and disappear emotionally or physically, then you cannot expect to address the problems between or assume the relationship will endure. If you are angry and critical all the time the relationship is doomed. Researchers have revealed that we need about five positive or affirming interactions for every negative, disempowering one to assure the longevity of relationships.

In some cases the quarrels intensify and lead to abuse or violence. When this occurs it is definitely time to seek professional help. Better still, seek help before things get so out of hand. There is no excuse for abuse or violence. No one made you do it. Don't lower yourself to this way of acting because you can't get your own way or to silence your partner. Be mature enough to journey through the difficulties. Walk away from angry situations that could lead to abuse or violence. Remember the one you're with you chose for the good qualities you saw in them. Force yourself to see these qualities in them again or the relationship will die of grief. Talk, draw, write, walk together to set house rules and goals.



Children will take on board how you act, how you say things, not what you say. Is this how you want them to behave in their relationships?

If you let things go without resolving the issues because the fight became too intense, don't think the problems will go away. They are still there and frustration will rise up again in due course and a fresh round of arguing will ensue. In fact running away from problems will make them ferment into something that could explode!

#### What you can do about problems between you and your partner.

Schedule a time to sit down together to discuss one issue at a time. Give yourself time to talk uninterrupted, switch off phones, ban everyone else. Have paper and pens to write things down to ponder later.

Touch each other and state your commitment to your relationship and working something out. Tell your partner 3 things you appreciate or love about them as you begin your talk.

Make it a rule to listen to each other one at a time. This means listening so you can repeat back to your partner what you heard they said, together with the feelings you saw expressed. Wait for your partner to confirm that what you say you heard and the feelings you think you saw were accurate for them. If not, listen again and repeat back what you heard and saw expressed in feelings. Do this until you get the verbal and emotional messages right. Allow your partner to state their case and express their feelings without judgement or blame, no huffing or puffing, no eye rolling. Respectful listening is required. And yes it is hard and takes emotional maturity. And you can do it.

When you express your thoughts and feelings about an issue avoid blaming or criticising your partner. Describe in action words what your partner said or did or didn't say or do and state how it affected you. Allow your partner to repeat back what they heard. Correct any misinterpretation till you hear your partner has understood what you said and felt.

One at a time, each person should now clearly state what they want from their partner. Allow your partner to repeat back what they heard you want from them. If accurate say so, if not, restate what you want. Be disciplined not to expand what said you want to include other things.

Ask, don't demand, whether your partner will do what you said you want from them. If yes, ask for a formal commitment and make a time when this will happen next. If not, ask why not. Start the listening, repeating process till you each understand why your partner won't do what you want them to do.

Decide if you can accept and live with what your partner is unwilling to do for you. Ask your partner if they are prepared to do anything else that resembles or satisfies what you wanted. Work for a mutually satisfying solution. If you don't do this the problem will just fester.

Acknowledge that your partner understood you. Touch each other, hug or kiss to celebrate working out something together. Commit to doing what you said you would do and do it.

It takes two to tango and only one to stop the dance. Relationships entail sacrifice, compromise, giving in. They also provide security, love, understanding, fairness, pleasure, joy. Make sure sacrifice and giving in is balanced by joy and pleasure so the relationship feels rewarding for both parties. Each of you is responsible for your own and your partner's sense of well being. Are you doing your bit?



People are unique so don't expect your partner to be exactly like you, want to like or do everything you like or want to do. Accept your differences. Staying curious about differences of opinion, behaviour, taste, concerns helps keep communication open. Find out why your partner has these differences from you and how they serve him or her. Don't judge or criticise. Moulding someone into a copy of yourself won't enhance your relationship. Reshaping yourself to be what you're not also won't improve your

relationship and will destroy your self esteem and confidence. Some differences have to be accepted and lived with. Some need to change. A quick rule is that behaviour that is deliberate can always be changed even if uncomfortable. If you're a slob, work on changing one or two key slobbish behaviours till you develop a good habit of cleanliness or tidiness with those two things. If you're selfish, make an effort to do two things each day for your partner without looking for any reward. It will help you develop a degree of generosity. Over time small changes in behaviour amount to huge changes that can improve relationships. It's up to you both. Are you prepared to work as a team for the two of you?