

Insights and Wisdom for Couples

Below are insights and wisdom I have collected over years of working with couples and reading literature on having happy successful relationships. It is work in progress and periodically updated. Feel free to email me and share anything you would like to add to it.

Take your time as you go over them. Stop and discuss thoughts and feelings about each one. This is also a "we" not "you" list.

Paying on the front-end costs much less than paying on the back-end. I commonly hear people say we don't have the time, it's too much work, etc. This reminds me of a lumberjack not taking time to sharpen his saw because he doesn't have time. Would you rather spend 30 minutes reading, having a meeting, going over the House Rules or would you rather spend 30 minutes fighting? It's your choice.

Believe it or not... the other person comes with an "Owner's Manual." Can you imagine trying to fly or repair an airplane without an owner's manual? It would be a recipe for disaster. The same thing happens when people are not aware of the other person's needs, method of communicating, past wounds, triggers, values, etc. Take time to learn the person's owner's manual and to share more about yours.

Make honesty easy for the other person (many times people end up lying to others because of the cost the other makes them pay for telling their truth). If you are tired of the other lying to you, then make telling the truth as easy as possible while still keeping them accountable and sharing how it has impacted you. Openly listening, keeping emotional response appropriate and not judging the other will help them be more honest.

Relationships need good shock absorbers. The healthier a relationship is the smoother the ride. When a car has good shock absorbers, it can flow easily and comfortably over the bumps of life, but if the shock absorbers are poor then each little bump feels jolting. Couples who have really good shock absorbers are able to be more relaxed around one another and even get "sloppy" with each other and move quickly through it.

If you are tired of the person repeating the same thing over and over again, then reflect back your understanding and check to see if you really understood. Another possibility is that you keep doing the same thing or the issue isn't really resolved for the other person. People will keep saying the same thing over and over again until they truly feel heard and responded to.

When approaching a disagreement, let the other person speak first and really listen to them. When this is accomplished the other person is much more likely to hear you. If you go first, there is a good change you will not be heard.

Women tend to be more symbolic and men more concrete in how they see and interpret the world. For a woman, a man leaving the milk out might be interpreted as "He doesn't care about me or respect me." When, for a man, leaving the milk out is just leaving the milk out. When I tend to do this more when there is an underlying problem in the relationship that is unresolved. For instance, if the woman feels like the man cares about and respects her, then leaving the milk out is just leaving the milk out. This is why people tend to argue about "small"



things. I find that the small things are actually an opportunity to work on the more important issues that need to be resolved.

A major area where communication tends to break down is when people focus on the past and problem, rather than healing, resolution, and moving towards a shared goal. Staying in the past always ends up in excuses, justifications, and turning it around with "well, you..." in response from the other person. Discussions tend to work much better focusing on where you would like things to be going in a solution-oriented manner. Strike while the iron is cold. Look for when the person is doing the opposite of the problem or something productive and then to acknowledge it and thank them. This will keep things moving in a productive direction.

Use empathy!!!!!! Put yourself in the other person's shoes and imagine what it must be like to be them experiencing you. This goes a long way.

Make sure you understand from the other person's perspective and not your own. Imagine going to an eye doctor and you say I have problems seeing and the eye doctor takes off his glasses and gives them to you. Because it works for you doesn't mean it will work for another.

As far as arguing goes... Wouldn't you rather be doing something else with your time?!? Couples that learn to communicate well have much more peace, fun, and intimacy. It also frees up a lot of your thoughts, emotional energy, and time to be productive.

I've never heard anyone argue with these words and sincerely said, "You're right" and "I'm sorry."

Would you rather be right or would you rather be happy?

When we speak or act out of anger or other high emotion we almost always create the opposite of what we truly want.

Be aware of your negative assumptions. How can a person already deemed guilty get a fair trial? Couples regularly create stories about who the other is and what their intentions are. Negative assumptions keep you locked into the old stories and not giving the person a chance.

Ask yourself "Who do I want to be?" and "How do I want to show up" in this discussion. I've never answered this question as petty, defensive, closed off, etc. This will guide you in the

direction of being more productive and effective.

The other person is usually not lying to you!!!! She/he is almost always telling you their belief about you and the situation. It doesn't mean it is the "truth," but it is their truth about their perception and experience.

It takes two people to argue. You have more power than you have realized to have productive healthy conversations.

Be accountable. Avoid being the victim. Anytime I am angry, I am being the victim.

Compromise. Most "problems" can be resolved by each person taking a step towards the other. Spend time listening and really considering their point of view.

For men- don't close down or withdraw. Realize that emotions/feelings can be just as valid and important as logic.

For women- use 80% logic, don't add too much emotion if you want to be heard and responded to

Talk about the issue/problem when it is not happening and while both of you are calm so that you can resolve it. Most people wait until they can't take it anymore, jump on a small instance of the problem, and over-react based on the built-up emotion.

Be aware that the problem that surfaces often times is just a small example of the real problem or may not even be the "real" problem at all. By listening and asking questions in a safe manner, the real issues tend to surface.

Don't talk over every small problem that arises. However, not talking about significant problems in order to preserve the relationship tends to end up ruining the relationship in the end.

Avoid going over the past too much. People just go round and round with this one.

Avoid blame and increase accountability. Reduce the "Well you did....." and increase "What I hear you saying" and "I see how I have affected you..."

Really listen before responding. Listen more than you speak. There is a reason we were born with two ears and one mouth.

Pay attention to your body. Is it open, closed, receptive or defensive? Which will get you what you really want?

Approach the discussion with openness and curiosity. Avoid holding onto your position too strongly.