

Healthy Marriage Tip



Do you think she is getting through? Do you think his reaction is helping the situation? Have you ever handled a marital conflict like either of these lions?

It is obvious that neither approach is effective in helping us manage, or resolve, conflict in a way that will strengthen our marriage rather than damage it. So, why do we keep falling into this trap?

Researchers have discovered we tend to react this way because our brains are wired for “Fight” or “Flight” during verbal conflicts. However, researchers have also discovered humans can rewire their brains to handle verbal conflicts in a constructive manner.

Five Tips to Rewire Your Brain

1. Increase the Level of Respect You Feel Towards Your Spouse. When was the last time you lost control in front of someone you greatly respected? We tend to have greater control over our words and emotions when we respect those around us. The greater the level of respect you feel towards your spouse the easier it is to listen to your

spouse. A respectful tone of voice comes naturally and it is easier to think before you speak.

2. Stay in Control. A basketball coach will call a time-out when things are getting out of control. He calms his players down and helps them focus on what they need to do to accomplish their goal. The same principle applies in marriage. Learn to call time-outs. There is no limit to the number of time-outs you have; so, use them as frequently as you need.

3. Look at the Conflict From Your Spouse's Viewpoint. Many conflicts come from simple misunderstandings. Misunderstandings can easily be discovered if you first take time to see the conflict from your spouse's viewpoint. Before you attempt to share your viewpoint, make sure you completely understand your spouse's viewpoint. This exercise can also help you discover compromises you might have otherwise overlooked.

4. Change Your Conditioning. One researcher found if he rang a bell when he fed a dog, eventually he could just ring the bell and the dog would begin to salivate. The same conditioned response can happen in a marital relationship. Certain phrases such as "We need to talk" or "Your mother" can cause your heart rate to rise and your brain to kick into "Fight" or "Flight" mode.

The first step to changing this conditioned response is to recognize what is happening. Make a list of the phrases that set you off. Brainstorm with your spouse a list of alternative phrases that can be used. Before using these new phrases make sure you have a game plan in place to implement tip #5.

5. Make it Safe. It is easier to ignore the "Fight" or "Flight" urge if we feel safe in a conversation. As soon as we feel attacked or backed into a corner it is almost inevitable we will fall into "Fight" or "Flight" mode. This is why we need to work extra hard at helping our spouse feel emotionally safe during a difficult conversation.

Tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and our choice of words all significantly contribute to the level of safety our spouse feels during a conversation. If they feel threatened by any of the above, chances are pretty good they will either fight back or retreat. As soon as you sense your spouse is either fighting back or retreating, you need to immediately stop and figure out what you said or did that made them no longer feel safe. Once you figure it out, apologize and make the appropriate change. If you do not stop immediately then you will likely get pulled into a downward spiral where you both end up saying things you will later regret.

By taking the time and effort to learn and implement these five tips you can significantly decrease the number of times you find yourself on one side or the other of this photo. Nevertheless, implementing these tips is not easy to do. Changing how you interact during difficult conversations takes time and a lot of effort. However, ask yourself if you

would rather continue dealing with the emotional fall-out from acting like these lions or make some changes and prevent losing control in the first place.

A healthy and happy marriage is within the reach of all couples who put the time and effort into achieving it.