

# TO FIGHT OR NOT TO FIGHT IS THAT THE QUESTION?

According to marriage and family counselor Dr. John Gottman, 69 percent of marriage conflicts are never solved. 69 percent! We are having the same fight over and over again. He calls these unresolved issues 'gridlock'. I do not know about you, but whenever I have been "gridlocked" whether it's in traffic, a crowd of people at a festival, or in a fight with a loved one I find it stressful and unpleasant.

If only 30% of our disagreements are solved why do we continue to fight with our partner? Shouldn't we get along with the person we love and cherish? You may have trouble letting go of the fighting habit because of two factors: social expectations (expectations most people have about marriage) and myths (beliefs not based on fact.) There are many myths and expectations about fighting in marriage.

1. Fighting is a necessary part of being a couple.
2. All married couples fight.
3. Fighting is a normal part of marriage.

The truth is fighting accomplishes nothing, and it isn't necessary for couples to argue, to yell, or to have furious discussions to solve problems. In fact, more problems are created by "gridlocked" fighting patterns. Hanging on to these ideas makes it difficult to let go of fighting. That being said, all couples are different. Every couple has their own style

and levels of comfort. We know people who are loud and have "boisterous" discussions with others all the time. However, they are not angry and this is just their way of communicating. We also know people who never raise their voices with each other and seem kind and loving all of the time. As long as they are happy with their own style and they are able to resolve differences positively, we have no right to judge another couples level of communication.

What are some of the myths/expectations about fighting?

- Fighting clears the air and truth emerges. - Angry fighting does not bring out the truth and is much more likely to result in being defensive, saying things you really do not mean, and in a much more hurtful way. When you fight you try to "win" a battle not reach an understanding.
- With your partner anything goes! - For some reason we often think we can treat our loved ones with less respect than a stranger. We would never think of acting with our friends or boss the way we do with our spouse.
- She or he started it. I had no choice. I had to defend myself.
- I can't help it, It just happens. I guess I am just an emotional person.
- I never hit. It's okay to yell, swear, or throw

*This column sponsored by:*



Affiliated Clinical Services Inc.  
38 Sell Drive, Hartford WI 53027  
262-673-0301

stuff. You have to get it out.

None of the above is true. We have a responsibility to ourselves and our partner to behave in a calm, respectful, effective, and logical way - even when angry, hurt, or scared.

No matter what you're fighting about: money, sex, kids or something else, gridlocked fighting is an indication that your communication isn't working. If this happens occasionally, such as when one or both of you are tired or stressed; it's not a serious problem. However, if you keep fighting about the same thing constantly your communication is not functioning, and you don't know how to move from problem to solution. When this happens, problems are recurrent, endless, and escalate into relationship disasters.

The therapists at ACS, Inc. have the expertise to help you find solutions to gridlock and its emotional fallout. If you find yourself feeling depressed, chronically angry, and in an endless loop of fighting, why not give counselling a try?

**Next month:** From Gridlock to Freedom - How Happy Couples Fight