

HOW TO ARGUE

SO YOUR SPOUSE WILL LISTEN



6
principles
for turning
arguments into
conversations

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Author of Safe Haven Marriage

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

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ONE SO YOU ARGUE

The Power of a Couple's Arguments

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Where are you in your relationship? The following list of statements will help you focus on how you understand your arguments. To gauge how relevant each statement is to you, answer: Hardly at all, Sometimes, or Most of the time.

Hardly at all

Sometimes

Most of the time

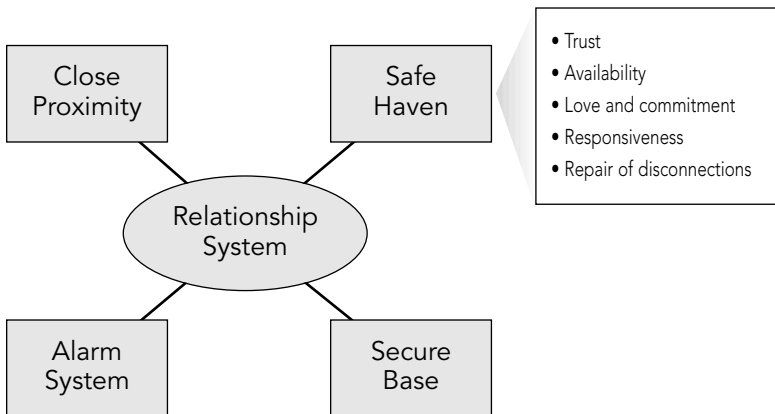
1. Despite all the arguing between my spouse and me, we don't value and care for each other.
2. We are not aware of how our personalities, early growing-up experiences, and fears impact how we argue.
3. Our arguments don't seem to be about the "topic" we are arguing about.
4. Sometimes we react bigger than the situation calls for.
5. It is not my intention to say hurtful things or shut my spouse out, but I do.
6. One of us tries to calm things down while the other feels he or she has to state his or her case stronger and louder to be understood.

7. I often get so mad or frustrated that I forget the good about my spouse when we are arguing.
8. There are some hurtful situations I can't let go of, even though my spouse has apologized for them many times.
9. We disagree on when to come back and discuss and resolve an argument.
10. When we come back and discuss our arguments, another argument often starts, so hardly any of our arguments ever get resolved.
11. We have a very difficult time agreeing on what the other should say when apologizing for his or her part in the argument.
12. It is hard to stay connected, caring, and considerate when we discuss hot topics.
13. Generally, my spouse and I are not good friends, not very connected or loving to each other.

To score: If you answered "Sometimes" or "Most of the time" for any of the above questions, then you need to read on.

TWO WHAT KEEPS US CLOSE AND CONNECTED

The Inner Workings of Our Relationship System



When Your Safe Haven Doesn't Feel So Safe

Relationship System appraises encounter, asking:

"Are you my safe haven?"



Are you listening?

Are you there for me?

Do you love and respect me?

Are you available and responsive?

Do you understand me?



"NO"



Relationship System

sounds the alarms and you:

protest ➤ despair ➤ detach

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. When growing up, were your parents physically around and available? How emotionally available were your parents? How did they comfort you when you were sad or hurt? How did they come back and reconnect with you when you got into trouble? How do you feel your early experiences have impacted you as an adult today?
2. What kind of safe haven have you and your spouse been for each other over the course of your marriage? That is, have you had quality time together, built trust, been emotionally and physically available to each other, responded to each other in a considerate manner, and repaired your arguments in constructive ways?
3. Sometimes we get angry in hopes of our spouse seeing our hurts and doing something about it. Think back on the last few times you and your spouse argued. How did your anger or hope come into play?

THREE DRAGONS AND VULNERABILITIES

The Hidden Meanings that Fuel Our Arguments

Experiences over your lifetime ➤ Become your “dragons” today

Past hurts, fears

your sensitive spot

What made you feel scared,

your vulnerabilities

alone, vulnerable, unloved,

what you fear

misunderstood, disrespected

what hurts

How you responded then . . . ➤ Shapes how you automati-

cally react today when your
dragons are raised.

**How did you view yourself and others?
What hurt you, and how did you react?**

Here are some descriptive words to help you out.

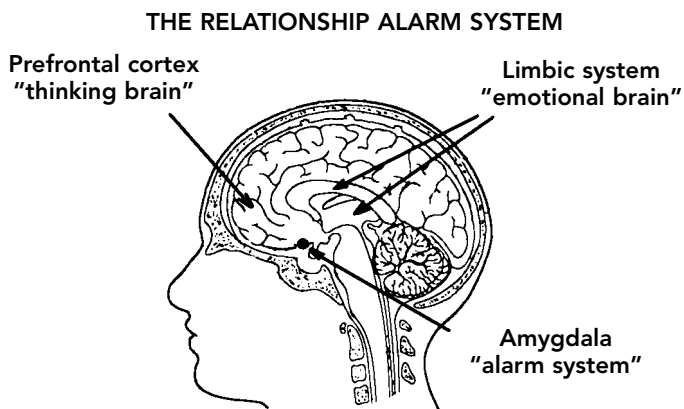
<i>Viewed Myself</i>	<i>Viewed Others</i>	<i>What Hurt Me</i>	<i>How I Reacted</i>
Lovable	Able to love me	Left alone a lot	Left the situation
Unworthy	Willing to love me	Neglected	Argued
The hero	Unavailable	Abused	Became self-sufficient
The black sheep	Emotional	Rejected	Avoided strong emotion
Special	Unpredictable	Not seen	Did things to please
Crybaby	Caring, always there	Not respected	Became silent
Rejected	Rejecting	Belittled	Fearful, worried
Alone	Punishing	Ignored	Got angry
Self-sufficient	Loyal	No comfort	Cried a lot

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

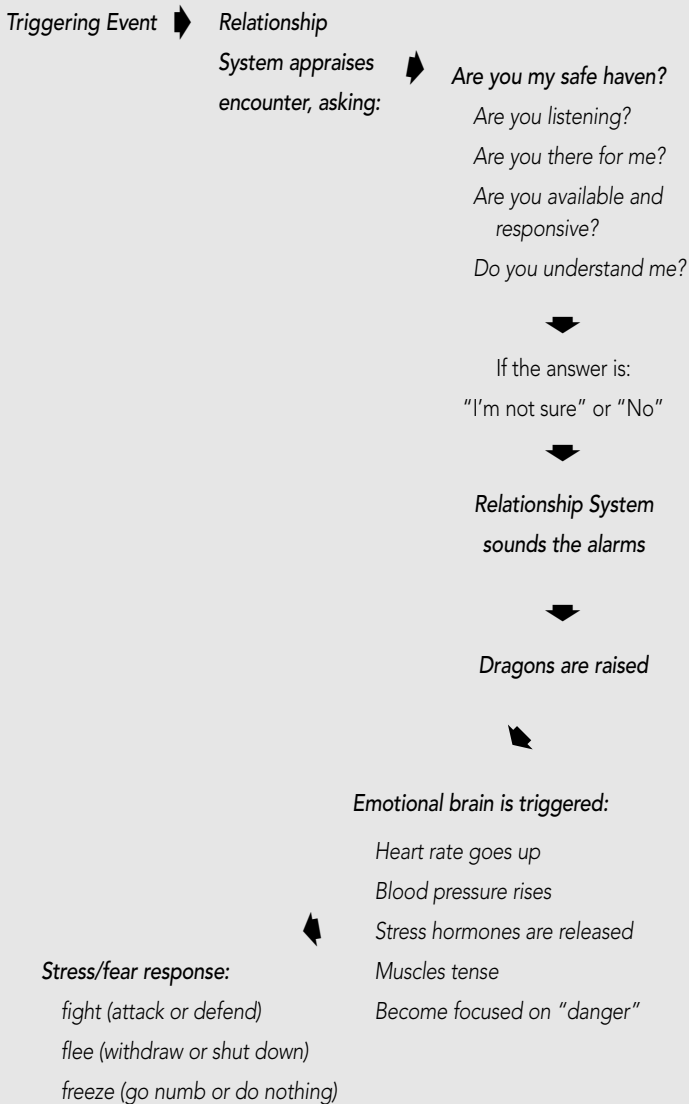
1. List the hot topics in your marriage. What do you argue about most?
2. What kinds of things does your spouse say or do that to you infer to mean, "You are not my safe haven; you are not emotionally available, thoughtful, or responsive"?
3. What are your dragons, vulnerabilities, and tender places?
4. How do you react when your dragons are raised? (For example, do you get angry, yell, pursue, defend, or withdraw?)
5. Go back and answer the above questions from your spouse's perspective.

FOUR ANATOMY OF AN ARGUMENT

What Happens to Our Hearts, Minds, and Bodies
When Our Relationship Alarms Sound Off



When Your Safe Haven Doesn't Feel So Safe



QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

To help you become more aware of what happens during your arguments, recall the last time you and your spouse took the “low road” during an argument and answer the following questions:

1. What was the triggering event?
2. How did you perceive your spouse? (For example, did you perceive your spouse as your safe haven, available and responsive, listening and trying to understand you? Did you feel your spouse was defending him/herself or attacking you?)
3. What dragons were raised?

Here are a few examples:

No one is there for me.

This is unfair.

I’m not in control.

Don’t tell me what to do.

I do all the work, and no one helps or appreciates me.

I am right because if I am wrong, then I am bad and rejected.

I am not respected or considered.

You are not a teammate to me.

I have no spiritual covering over me.

I am always taken advantage of.

I feel cornered and pressured.

No one really understands me.

I am not smart or skilled enough.

I am always left out.

I am always competing for your attention.

I am not noticed.

I feel smothered and controlled.

I am not protected or valued.

It is all my fault.

4. When your emotional brain is triggered, how do you feel stress in your body, and how do you react? (For example, your heart rate goes up, your muscles tense, and you either fight, flee, or freeze.)
5. In the middle of an amygdala hijacking, how can you remind yourself of a more productive way of expressing your perspective?

FIVE THE INEFFECTIVE WAYS WE ARGUE

Learn Better Ways to Be Heard and Understood



What Happens in the Spin Cycle?

He is protesting her being late because in the moment he feels she doesn't value him.



She is defending herself against his anger and critical attacks and doesn't see his hurt.

He missed her and really wants her to see his sadness, come close, and problem-solve.



She would be able to comfort him if she knew he was sad and missed her (or he could teach her what he needs to be comforted).

The Negative Spin Cycle of Your Argument

Wife is late to bed



Are you there for me?



"No, you are not."



*Your reaction
causes your wife to
appraise whether you
are a safe haven*



Dragon:

*"I am not your priority.
No one considers me."*



Emotional brain:

*heart rate goes up,
muscles tense
focus on wife not
being there*



Emotions arise:

*sad, lonely (primary)
anger, frustration
(secondary) (these harsher
emotions expressed)*



Stress response:

*ready to fight and
attack*



QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Review your last argument. Did you feel disrespected, disappointed, let down, ignored, or other such emotions? Were you able to express them to your spouse, or did you instead express your secondary, harsher emotions?

Your primary emotions

Disappointment, let down,
ignored

Your secondary

emotions/reactions

anger, criticism,
blame, defensiveness

2. How did you and your spouse react to each other during the argument? Were any of these harsh responses present?

harsh start-up	criticism	defensiveness	contempt
name-calling	hostile humor	put-downs	sarcasm
nagging	threatening	withdrawal and stonewalling	
punishment	sulking	negative interpretation	

3. What were you each feeling under all the criticism, defensiveness, anger, and frustration? What were you really trying to get each other to understand?
4. Do you have to react this way to be heard and understood? What is another way you can react in order for your spouse to listen and understand? Explore other ways you and your spouse can react in order to be heard.

SIX PRINCIPLE ONE: CREATE A SAFE PLACE

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. List the positive aspects of your spouse. Write these on a card and carry them in your wallet or place them on your bathroom mirror. Refer to them as a reminder of all you value in your spouse the next time you are stuck in an argument and can only remember your spouse's weaknesses.
2. With your spouse, create your own acacia-tree promise statement. Refer to the six statements in this chapter as a reference as you write your own.
3. When stuck arguing, what are the negative thoughts that come to mind about your spouse and/or yourself? Are they legitimate? What positive thoughts can replace them?

SEVEN PRINCIPLE TWO: SOFTEN REACTIONS AND COMFORT DRAGONS

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Recall the last incident when the roar of your dragon scared off your spouse. How did you react? How did your spouse react to you?
2. How can you soften your reactions when stuck in an argument?
3. What is your spouse's love language? What makes him or her feel comforted and connected to you during and after an argument (meaningful touch, words of affirmation, acts of kindness, gifts, quality time)?
4. What is your love language? What makes you feel comforted, connected, and close to your spouse during and after an argument? What hinders you from absorbing your spouse's comfort after an argument?

EIGHT PRINCIPLE THREE: TALK, LISTEN, AND UNDERSTAND

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Go back to your last argument and ask your spouse what he or she was trying to get you to understand.
 - a. What was your spouse feeling besides angry, shut down, or frustrated?
 - b. What makes it difficult for you to listen to and empathize with your spouse's perspective?
 - c. Ask your spouse what would help to make him/her feel heard and understood during an argument.
2. Review the six steps of listening and identify the areas where you are strong and where you need to grow in terms of listening and empathizing.
3. What point of action can you take to improve listening and empathizing with your spouse?

NINE PRINCIPLE FOUR: COMPLAIN CONSTRUCTIVELY

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. What unresolved arguments or issues would you like to discuss with your spouse under the safety of your acacia tree? Write out each of your issues, concerns, or complaints in a considerate, nonblaming manner.
2. What information will help your spouse understand why this complaint, concern, or request is important to you?
3. List the feelings such as hurt, frustration, and disappointment you want your spouse to understand regarding this concern.
4. What truth is there in your spouse's perspective regarding your concern?
5. What dragon could your complaint trigger in your spouse? How can you be sensitive to that?
6. What truth is there in your spouse's perspective regarding your complaint?
7. With your spouse, explore solutions to your complaint or concerns, remembering to soften your statements in order to avoid triggering each other's defensiveness.
8. Tell your spouse how you appreciate his or her listening to and considering your concerns.

TEN PRINCIPLE FIVE: MAKE AMENDS

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. As you were reading through this chapter, what hurt or offense came to mind that is a point of unforgiveness in your heart?
2. What was your spouse's perspective on the incident that hurt or offended you?
3. Recognize and acknowledge your part in the situation and tell your spouse. If need be, apologize to your spouse.
4. How have you continued to punish your spouse for what he or she did to hurt you? What Bible verse or prayer can you say to give you strength as you release your right to hurt your spouse back?
5. What do you and your spouse need in order to open up your hearts, trust, and reconnect with each other?

ELEVEN PRINCIPLE SIX: RECONNECT AND ENJOY EACH OTHER

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Discuss with your spouse how you can de-stress and simplify your life to make emotional space, time, and energy to invest in your friendship.
2. What are everyday tasks that you can turn into connecting rituals? With your spouse, write out affirming statements you can say when you wake up, leave for work, return home, and go to bed.
3. How can you foster an atmosphere that will help improve your intimacy together? Discuss with your spouse what he/she needs to feel more comfortable with intimacy and eager for sex.
4. Think back over the last week. When did you experience defining moments, where you could have reacted either negatively or positively?
5. When faced with these defining moments or forks in the road when you could be either grumpy, irritable, negative, and critical, or positive, affirming, and well-mannered—how do you typically react? How could you choose a more positive way of responding and interacting with your spouse?
6. How can you better love, respect, and cherish your spouse?