

Stress Bytes Newsletter

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“WHEN STRESS BITES, BITE BACK!”

THE NEWSLETTER OF ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.
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Fight No More!

When I ask an audience what comes to mind when I say “conflict”, they usually give all the negatives associations first: war, fighting, pain, upset, anger, argument, and divorce. When I prompt them for positive associations to the word “conflict,” uncomfortable laughter ripples across the room. Usually I have to help them get started by saying “resolution, negotiation, cooperation, collaboration and relief.” Once in awhile someone will throw in “make-up sex!” There’s one in every crowd!

When I ask what is the best outcome to expect from a conflict, the overwhelming response is “Compromise.” Everyone has heard that in a relationship “you have to compromise.” I disagree. I believe the best resolution to conflict is “collaboration.” Think about it: compromise is a win-lose outcome. Someone gives in to get part of something they want, even if it’s the end to a fight. Undoubtedly when counseling a fighting couple, someone will say, “yeah, but I’m always the one doing the compromising....and I resent it.” I agree. On the other hand, collaboration is a win-win solution. Both parties get what they want.

Therein lies the trick; as most couples when fighting take an adversarial posture, having to “prove” that their way is the “right” way or arguing “facts” with each other. Emotions run high and people say and do things they regret later in an attempt to get their way. The conflict becomes personal and the issue they are trying to resolve has been long forgotten. Instead of negotiating for what they want or calmly discussing options to resolve an issue, conflict can dissolve into name calling, arguing who said what and when, or stonewalling (where one person refuses to discuss it anymore because they are so upset) or worse, physical violence.

Learning to negotiate, as opposed to fighting unproductively with your spouse or partner, is complex. Assuming no one is distorting reality due to a mental illness, or unconsciously trying to manipulate the other due to a personality disorder, the way for both parties to get what they want is to set aside time to discuss one issue at a time.

Start by describing what you see, hear and observe (without labeling the other person) that leads you to be concerned about an issue. Next, admits to your assumptions, interpretations,

and irrational beliefs about what the other person’s behavior means. Then separate those assumptions from your feelings and state those simply, i.e. “Because you take the checkbook to work everyday, I assume you don’t trust me to manage our money. Because I assume this, I feel hurt and angry.”

The next step is to state what you want for yourself, the other person and both of you as a couple. For example, you want your spouse or partner to trust you to handle **cont’d on Page 2**



“My husband and I are getting along much better now. We’re outsourcing our arguments to a couple overseas.”

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Fight No More.....continued

Your money responsibly.

You may want to give your spouse some relief from always having to pay bills and keep the checkbook balanced. You may want for yourselves as a couple, a satisfactory way to share the financial responsibilities of the household.

When you are able to state what you want for yourselves as a couple, that is the time to pause and ask your spouse or partner if that is something they want too. If they enthusiastically agree, then you have hit upon the “win-win” outcome. Figuring out the details of how accomplish this outcome involves evaluating what you’ve tried in the past, what you’re doing currently, and brainstorming about what you could do in the future. Then agree to pick a way to proceed in the future and come back in a week or two to evaluate how it’s going.

If at any point in these negotiations tempers flare, remember to ask for a “time out” and take a break to let yourself calm down. Remember, though, you *must* agree when to get back together to finish the discussion. Don’t just walk away.

If you have a history of fighting and never resolving issues with your spouse or if such disagreements have ever resulted in physical violence or threats of divorce, seek professional help.

DIVORCE STATISTICS

- 50—67% OF FIRST MARRIAGES IN THE UNITED STATES END IN DIVORCE
- FAILURE OF SECOND MARRIAGES ARE ABOUT THE SAME OR 10% HIGHER
- CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE INCLUDE INCREASED RISK OF—
 - AUTO ACCIDENTS
 - PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ILLNESS
 - SUICIDE
 - VIOLENCE
 - HOMICIDE
 - SHORTENED LIFESPAN

SOURCE: MARTIN & BUMPASS, 1989



“Sometimes it’s smooth sailing and sometimes they sink. That’s why they’re called relationships!”

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE OUR FREE NEWSLETTER VIA EMAIL, PLEASE SEND AN EMAIL TO DRANNETTE@MCHSI.COM WITH THE WORDS “SUBSCRIBE TO STRESS BYTES” IN THE SUBJECT LINE.

FEEL FREE TO COPY AND FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER IN ITS ENTIRETY TO ANYONE YOU KNOW WHO MAY BENEFIT FROM IT.

Gottman Scale: Can You Work Things Out?

Instructions: Circle the answer that is true *most of the time* for you.

Talking things over with my partner only seems to make them worse.	Yes No
I'd rather just keep things to myself.	Yes No
I am a very private person about my feelings.	Yes No
When I'm in a bad mood, I'd much rather just go off by myself.	Yes No
I don't see much point in discussing my troubles with my partner.	Yes No
Talking about our problems only gets them more muddled.	Yes No
There are some people you just can't talk to, and my partner's one of those.	Yes No
I'd rather try to work out our marital problems alone.	Yes No
Our conversations about our problems never seem to get anywhere.	Yes No
I don't place a lot of faith in delving into my problems with my spouse.	Yes No
I have given up on trying to talk things out.	Yes No
I don't see any potential gain in trying to talk things over with my partner.	Yes No

Scoring: If you answered “yes” to 4 or more questions, then you may have given up working things out with your spouse or partner. This attitude reveals “stonewalling” which is one of the main signs of a relationship that’s in trouble. You may benefit from learning how to negotiate effectively with your significant other.

This self-test was taken from John M. Gottman, Ph.D. “The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy.”

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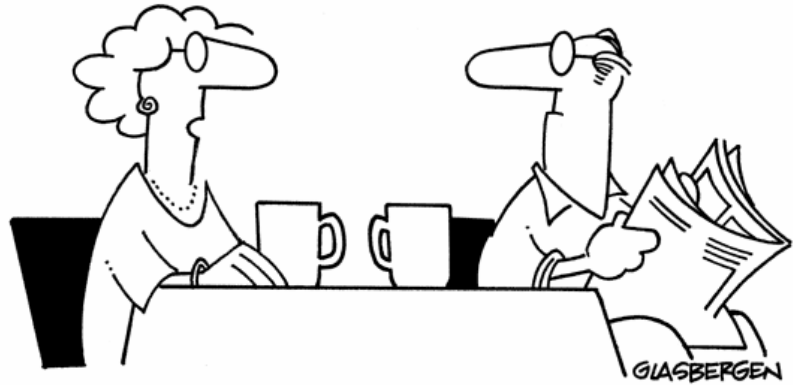
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The Stress Doctor is IN!!!

“A CO-COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP IS ONE IN WHICH TWO PEOPLE SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN BEING WHOLE, COMPLETE INDIVIDUALS. THE COMMITMENT IS TO GOING ALL THE WAY, TO LETTING THE RELATIONSHIP BE THE CATALYST FOR THE INDIVIDUALS TO EXPRESS THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AND CREATIVITY.”

FROM CONSCIOUS LOVING: THE JOURNEY OF CO-COMMITMENT BY GAY & KATHLYN HENDRICKS, PH.D.



**“Same-sex marriage is nothing new.
We’ve been having the same sex for 25 years.”**

ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.

LICENSED CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

- 14 years experience gently helping individuals, couples and groups resolve personal problems, manage stress, and reach their full potential.
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What’s Ailing Your Marriage?

Are your interactions characterized by

- More negativity than positivity?
- Emotional disengagement?
- Gridlock vs. dialogue about ongoing issues?
- Harsh start-up of conflict discussions?
- The failure of husbands to accept influence from their wives?
- The failure of attempts to repair a breach?

This spells T-R-O-U-B-L-E!!!