

# Relationship Advice: How to Defuse an Argument in 3 Easy Steps

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

Unresolved, repetitive conflict is a top reason many couples seek marriage counseling. However, arguments are a natural, normal part of intimate relationships. Whenever two people live in close quarters and allow themselves to become vulnerable with each other, sooner or later misunderstandings and conflict are likely to result.

When handled with tact and sensitivity, conflict can have an important function in your relationship or marriage. A conflict can help clear the air of pent-up resentments; it can act as a powerful form of communication that lets your partner know what is important to you. Conflict can even pave the way for smoother times, giving your partner a blueprint to better understand your needs.

When conflicts become too intense, a cycle of attack and counter-attack prevents any real communication from occurring. Arguments that are repetitive and spiral out of control offer no benefit for the couple. The goal should therefore be to keep the level of intense emotions that accompany conflict manageable.

In its simplicity, this may seem like an easy task. However, keeping your cool in a heated moment requires a great deal of resolve. You will need to listen to your partner's message and show that you understand his/her position. (This of course doesn't mean that you give up your position in the argument.)

## 3 steps to defusing an argument:

1. Place your opinion temporarily on *hold* (easier said than done, especially if you feel that you are being treated unfairly) and take a few deep breaths to relax your body (physical tension is common during arguments and will only fuel your frustration—you can even call a momentary time-out if you're feeling overwhelmed).

2. Tell your partner or spouse that you want to *understand* his/her perspective. To really listen, you must step outside your ego and put a stop to any thoughts that criticize your partner for her/his position. Try to become authentically curious about *why* s/he is having that particular reaction.

3. Look for the kernel of *truth* in your partner's position—the truth that exists in your spouse or partner's perspective. Maybe s/he feels that you've been inconsiderate in some way or that you haven't been keeping up with your share of the household responsibilities. Whatever the case, your partner's viewpoint feels totally valid to him/her and trying to dispute this will only increase the divide between you. So listen carefully and work toward understanding, rather than formulating a counterattack.

We all want to feel understood, especially by our loved ones. When statements of understanding begin to enter into the conflict, you'll be surprised at how quickly the intensity of the argument decreases. And with a decrease in emotional intensity, the stage will be set for healthier and more effective communication.

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**Author Bio**

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

You can reach Dr. Nicastro via his website <http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com>