

When Little Fights Become Big Problems

By America's Family Coaches - Thriving Marriages Email - September 6, 2021

Q: We don't have big fights, but lots of little disagreements and hurts simmer under the surface. How can we handle these?

A: The moment you do or say something that hurts your spouse, you stand at a fork in the road. Whether you are aware of it or not, at that very moment you can choose to go in one of two directions. You may be standing at that junction right now. Perhaps a thoughtless word or deed in the last few hours or minutes has erected a barrier of distance in your relationship. It may not be a big deal; you wonder if your husband or wife even noticed it. But *you* know what happened. How will you respond to it? Which direction will you choose?

One choice is to go on with life as usual, as if nothing happened. You can pretend that everything is fine between you, even though you know it's not fine. You can be your cheery self, expecting the incident to blow over. But these kinds of fights, even the smallest of them, never really blow over. They tend to simmer below the surface and erupt at the most inconvenient times. You can do nothing if you want to, but we don't recommend it.

Your other choice, the second fork in the road, is to set to work to resolve fights as soon as possible. It means taking the initiative to set things straight, to clear the air, and to restore the relationship. It requires courage to restore and rebuild a relationship—regardless of which side of fights you're on. It also takes time, patience, trust, and maybe even some tears. But the benefits of a restored relationship far outweigh the effort involved.

To deal with conflict will require several important steps:

Humble yourself and pray

Before you say a word to your spouse, get on your knees and talk to God. Ask him to help you resolve the issue in a way that honors him. Ask for sensitivity to your spouse's perspective on the issue. As you pray, God will soften your heart and help you see his priorities for your relationship. Sometimes prayer is all you'll need. One of our callers told us, "I stopped saying to my busy pastor husband, 'Spend more time with me.' Instead, I went to God and said, 'God, I love my husband and want to spend more time with him. Allow him to have more time.' And God did!"

Look for the underlying cause of fights

As God searches your heart, keep alert for the real source of the hurt between you and your spouse. The latest incident may just be the trigger. There may be a deep, long-standing problem that has been buried over months or years and must be rooted out and dealt with. You may not know where to look for it, but God does. Listen to his voice—especially as he speaks to you through your spouse.

Make your relationship your top priority

Don't trivialize the need to clear the air between you and your spouse after a fight. This is no time to let a golf match, or a shopping trip interrupt the process of identifying hurts, confessing wrongs, and seeking forgiveness. You may even want to take a day or weekend away in order to avoid anything that would distract you.

Consider asking a trusted friend to hold you accountable

Sometimes it is very helpful to involve a third person who will hold you accountable for working through your fights. It should be someone you both trust and respect, someone who will treat your relationship and conflict with the utmost confidentiality. Invite this person to ask you periodically how you are doing at resolving the issue. God can direct you to such a person if you ask him.