

INTENTIONAL MARRIAGES

How to Repair after an Argument in 3 steps

1. Pause
2. Apologize and validate their feelings
3. Ask how you could have handled the situation differently

#1 - Pause

Pausing is probably the hardest step... apologizing is right behind it! If you are more verbal during an argument then this step will be really hard. It's like asking somebody in a full sprint to stop and have a casual conversation. The adrenaline is flowing and so are the mean things you'd like to say.

From several years of therapy, we've learned certain behaviors happen when you flood. Flooding is a fight or flight reaction to stress. Commonly known stress hormones are:

- adrenaline – hormone responsible for your immediate reaction, similar to the behavior used while driving and someone accidentally cuts you off
- norepinephrine – hormone makes you more aware and focused
- cortisol – this hormone is a little more complex but it basically is the hormone that tells your brain there is a threat

Flooding is the overwhelming release of these hormones, which cause us to either fight, flight or freeze. We have learned if you can p-a-u-s-e during the flooding stage and wait 20 minutes, this gives the body enough time to reabsorb the stress hormones back into your system. You will actually feel

differently about the conflict and you might protect yourself from saying unkind things.

#2 - Apologize & Validate

This step may feel formulaic but hearing the words, “I’m sorry, I can see how that hurt you.” brings you to a non-defensive posture. You’re hearing your spouse take responsibility for their part, which is part of the reason why we continue to fight, right?!

Immediately, our guard goes down and interestingly enough when Russ apologizes to me, I want to own my part, as well. If he stayed prideful and argumentative, so would I. But he has modeled this so well for me that I’m learning how to swallow my pride and apologize more often.

Don’t forget this is more than just an apology, it is an empathetic apology. Even if you don’t agree with your spouse’s perspective, the fact they are hurt is justification enough to apologize. Seeing from their point of view brings about healing that a simple apology cannot do alone.

So get specific when you apologize and empathize.

#3 - How can I do things differently next time?

This next step of asking ‘how could I have done things differently?’ has been a real game changer in our behavior. It’s one thing to apologize and show empathy but true changed behavior happens only when you understand how you can avoid future land mines or be sensitive in certain situations.

For example, Russ works from home sometimes. In the past, I would approach him with a stressful situation out of the blue and it would cause an argument instead of the help I was seeking. I’ve since learned that using a Softened Start-Up, which is simply starting the conversation with saying,

“I’ve got something stressful I need to share with you, is now a good time?”
It was the precursor to the conversation that he needed first.

So after the first time with blindsiding him with a stressful situation, our repair conversation ended with me asking him how I could handle those kind of situations better in the future. His request was to use a Softened Start-Up.



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