

Who Is Responsible Anyway?

When you find yourself in an argument or disagreement (notice how I say "find yourself" in an argument; we never start one...well, maybe once in a while...alright, alright, so even when we start an argument) with another family member, how can you make it bearable? Who is responsible to make it "go well"—the one who starts it or the one who finds themselves in the midst of it? Dr. Gottman suggests that both people involved in the argument (the speaker and the listener) hold responsibility for the outcome; both are responsible to make the argument end well. Here are 9 ways to help an argument end well: 4 tips for the speaker and 5 tips for the listener.



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Make Your
Argument
the Best Part
of Your Day

...At Least Make It
Bearable!

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The Speaker's Responsibility

- State your feelings in as neutral a manner as possible. Remain objective and state your feelings in a "soft manner" rather than an intense emotional manner. Intense emotion may overwhelm your spouse and make it difficult for them to hear what you are saying.
- Avoid making "you statements." "You statements" tend to blame, accuse, and attack your spouse. "You statements" will more often result in defensiveness from your spouse, escalating the argument. Avoid them.
- Use "I" statements to state how you feel in *this specific* situation. Really, the only person you can honestly report on is yourself. So, stick with "I statements" about yourself, not "you statements" about your spouse. Also, stick to one specific situation at a time. No need to throw in the kitchen sink. Stay specific and deal with one situation at a time.
- Convert your *complaint* about the other person into a *positive need* (or what your spouse can do to help). This offers your spouse a plan of action, a way to help remedy the situation. It reveals something about you to your spouse, increasing intimacy with your spouse.

When the Speaker...

...follows these four tips, it will change the whole feel of the argument. Instead of saying, "Here's what's wrong with *you*" and "This is what *you* need to stop" you will be saying, "Here's what *I* feel" and "Here is a positive thing *I* need from you."



The Listener's Responsibility

- Remember your spouse's "enduring vulnerabilities"—their triggers, buttons, troubling memories, etc. Remembering your spouse's "enduring vulnerabilities" will help shape your response to them. You can honor your spouse by avoiding the sarcastic or implied statements that push buttons and flip triggers. You can show love by responding with comments that calm their "enduring vulnerabilities."
- Turn toward your partner by postponing your own agenda. You will still get to talk about your concerns, but postpone talking for the moment so you can listen. Have the grace to be quick to listen and slow to speak. This will endear you to your spouse and reduce the conflict.

- Make understanding your spouse the goal. Instead of working to make sure your spouse understands your point of view, be gracious and work to understand their point of view. Let them have the first and last word!
- Listen non-defensively by postponing your response and getting in touch with your partner's pain or emotion. Listen to understand how this situation has made them feel. Underneath all the anger, do they feel unloved, devalued, unworthy, abandoned, inadequate?
- Empathize—respond to their underlying feeling with compassion and empathy. Assure them of your love and respect. Reaffirm your commitment and respond to their feelings with reassurance. You will find it helps everyone remain calm when you can summarize your partner's view and validate it with a sentence like..."I understand why you feel... because ..."

Follow these tips and you will find your arguments become the best part of the day...alright, so I exaggerate...a lot. But, honestly, follow these tips and you will find your arguments resolve more quickly and more productively. They become opportunities for growing intimacy...and making up will be a whole lot more fun!