

PULL THE PLUG—for constructive conflict

Even couples who don't fight, but avoid conflict, can benefit from mastering this skill. Expressing and exchanging opinions, preferences, dislikes, disappointments and hurts, can build relationship when done constructively without anger, blame or disrespect. But when anger, blame or disrespect are present, the conflict becomes destructive and more damage is done to the emotional connection between partners.

At this point in couple counseling, we are interested in stopping any and all damage that may still be taking place in your relationship. We call this “damage control” and seek to prevent continuing disaffection (loss of emotional connection) in your relationship.

When you consistently choose to “pull the plug” (outlined below) instead of escalating into anger or avoiding communication altogether, confidence will grow in your ability to talk about everything—past, present or future—with sanity, civility, and mutual respect:

1. Assign your own label to this procedure and agree to stop talking when it is invoked;
2. Create conversational opportunities, initially, about PRESENT—not past—issues;
3. When you hear your partner invoke it, try to feel good about what just happened;
4. Remind yourself, apart from your feelings, that your partner just did the homework;
5. Your partner has made a CHOICE to prevent any possible relationship DAMAGE;
6. Agree to return to the topic of conversation at a later time; Repeat as necessary!

DROP THE H-BOMB—for “teaching love”

Most partners rarely express hurt feelings in real time. Instead we suck it up (bad!) or snap back with anger (bad!). Both reactions cause disaffection and damage whereas revealing HURT, without anger or blame, pulls your partner closer and builds intimacy.

Your partner wasn't born knowing how to love you and hasn't powers of mind-reading, no matter how well you think you know each other. It is up to you to TEACH each other how you want to be loved and what feels like love—and what doesn't! So, stop “musterbating” (he *should* know that hurts me; she *ought* to do more) and courageously give voice to feelings of hurt and disappointment by often dropping the H-bomb:

1. Critical ingredients: (a) Non-angry; (b) Non-blaming; (c) Respectful; (d) Kind;
2. Dropping the H-bomb is a one-way teaching—not a dialogue; inform your partner;
3. ONLY use assertive “I Language” and never the word “you” in a blaming way;
4. Share your own negative feelings without telling your partner what to do or not do.