

Arguing in a Relationship

Even when you win... you lose!

It's in our nature to want to win.

When selfishness takes over, we'll do whatever it takes, say things just to hurt and harm, and spin or twist the truth into something unrecognizable just to come out on top. A huge percentage of relationships today suffer from the WIN/LOSE approach to communication. A partner more skilled in the art of relational war might be able to outwit, out-maneuver, or just outlast their spouse; or, to win they might just be willing to be more cruel.



Whether you're cruel or just tired of losing, when you find yourself constantly defending yourself, justifying your actions, retaliating, accusing your spouse to make yourself look better, or just refusing to let it go until your partner cries "Uncle!" you're operating under the **WIN/LOSE** communication mindset. When you're arguing with a **WIN/LOSE** mindset, even when you win, you lose.

Redefining what it means to win.

The goal of a healthy relationship is not to reach the end of life with more points won by winning arguments. Points from winning an argument makes the self-centered person inside celebrate overpowering our opponent, but for every win we chalk up, our partner scores a loss. Losing an argument doesn't inspire a spouse to be a better person. The emotional connection created by losing is the feelings of fatigue, failure, frustration and a fear that this is all my marriage will ever be. This is the shadow side of winning when the real goal is not to crush, but to captivate.

Instead of amassing argument war points, couples I'm working with are choosing to redefine winning and see victory as crossing the finish line holding hands with someone they know intimately, accept completely, and love unconditionally. My experience is this comes not from a **WIN/LOSE** mindset, but instead one focused on **UNDERSTAND/BE UNDERSTOOD**.

Winning through understanding and compassion.

Crossing the finish line together is accomplished through understanding our partner and seeking to be understood by them. We all want to be heard. We want to know our thoughts and opinions matter, whether they are best for the situation or completely unhealthy – we want our thoughts, feelings and behaviors validated by the important people in our lives. A spouse who learns to show how much they care in the communication style they choose makes huge strides toward meeting this need for validation. Add to that a focus on understanding and being understood, and you've struck relational gold!

Questions better than declarations create understanding.

When your partner says something that makes you feel defensive, instead of blasting back 10 reasons why they're wrong, ask the question, "Can you help me understand what makes you feel that way?" If the answer doesn't make sense to you, ask it again a different way with a desire to hear, understand and avoid judgment. Remember the goal is not to gather information to prove a point, but to understand your partner and then help them understand your feelings and emotional needs, without either winning or losing.

Most arguments at their core are not really about someone being right or wrong, but more about loneliness, fear, insecurity or hopelessness. Imagine a conversation where you ask enough thoughtful questions, listen closely enough to the pain below the surface, and care enough to set aside your desire to win long enough to validate your partner's feelings and emotional needs... you'd be well on your way to holding hands with your life-long best friend.

Next steps might include compromise, collaboration, capitulation, or some creative solution neither of you had any idea existed, but you'd be holding hands and walking together toward the finish line of being known intimately, accepted completely and loved unconditionally!

No more win/lose... it's all about UNDERSTAND/BE UNDERSTOOD.



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