

Facing the Issues

A COUPLES' GUIDE

All couples encounter issues — it is inevitable. They may stem from money, sex, parenting, leisure time, future goals or the other dynamics within a relationship. While avoiding these issues *seems* like a solution, the resulting long term tension can become unbearable. Uncomfortable silences may seem the price of avoiding anticipating anger if these issues were raised. But these silences create their own stresses as important decisions are postponed, goals, careers and even families are put on hold.

As it is important to know how to face these issues, the following guidelines will help you get started.

Find the Time

When it comes to bringing up issues, many people use excuses like *I'm waiting for the right moment* or they rely on wishful thinking to ignore their problems. **There are no perfect moments and problems will not just disappear.** A simple suggestion like, *Let's sit down and discuss the household budget after the kids are asleep at 10:00* helps get the process started.

Choose a Quiet Space

When discussing serious topics, uninterrupted time in a quiet space is important. Mutually agree to **turn off your phones and that neither of you will leave early.** Make sure you choose a setting that helps you stay focused, like at a kitchen table.

Remember, just because you are discussing the problem does not mean you have to resolve it right away. **It may take several meetings before you come to an agreement.**

Stay on Topic

It is easy for individuals to link issues. For example, a spouse may ignore household responsibilities if they feel sexually rejected while their partner may be withholding affection because of past resentments. Then a discussion over who is going to make dinner may turn into a review of years of resentments.

If your partner gets off topic, **politely interrupt them by offering to discuss the new topic after the current one.**



Ask For a Summary

Asking your partner to summarize what you were discussing may feel awkward, but **it is important to make sure your partner understands where you are coming from.** Too often couples end their discussions with the false sense that they have agreed on something when in fact neither had accurately listened to what was said.

Hang in There

Sometimes there is no painless way to address certain topics. **It takes courage to be direct with your opinions.** While some issues may never be resolved, attempting to understand each other's position is important.

Respect Your Partner

There may be times when you genuinely feel that your partner is being an idiot. This does not mean you have to say so, even if initially it would feel good. Venting your anger will only make things worse. This is especially true if venting includes name calling, sarcasm, or putting your partner down. **Your partner has the right to be listened to even if you think they are wrong.**

Cool Down

If your discussion is becoming verbally abusive or disrespectful, simply stop. **Call a time out and acknowledge what is happening.** Take a walk or just wait until both of you have cooled down. You can then resume your discussion in a calmer manner.

Acknowledge Your Partner

While one partner may appear more powerful or confident, facing the issues is hard for both partners. Acknowledging your partner may be as simple as saying, *I know this has been hard for you...* or *You have been doing a great job.* **Acknowledging each other's strengths helps in problem solving.**

Support Each Other

Couples assume that their partner knows what is wanted or needed. Do not count on it. People get so distracted with their own needs that they tune out the needs of their partner. **Sometimes all that is wanted is your partner's support.** Asking for support does not guarantee that you will get it. It is a risk but it is worth it.



Even after you have worked hard to resolve an issue, another one is sure to come up. Couples can become more loving, more confident and stronger as they face issues together.