

## **Mother Nurture**

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### ***5 Keys to Settling Marital Conflict***

*I'm sick of fighting! Enrico and I love each other, but wow do we argue, especially since having children. Help!*

No doubt about it, marital squabbles and even ugly fights usually increase after children come along. The causes are painfully familiar to us all: sleep deprivation, little time for oneself, feeling let down, vicious cycles of finger-pointing, the in-laws, etc. etc. We certainly fought more frequently and intensely after having kids than ever before.

To solve these problems - and maintain an intact family in which to raise precious children - we've found five key methods. They're not glib, they're not a TV sound bite, but they're the real deal. Try them yourself - and see if you can get your spouse to go along.

Here they are:

- Personal Well-Being - By taking better care of yourself, you'll be able to take better care of your partner, and have a cooler, clearer head in quarrels. This means really doing the fundamentals: protein with every meal, good vitamin supplements (please see our book if you have any questions), sleep as an extremely high priority, personal stress relief practices, and the support of good friends and family.
- The 80-20 Rule - Put 80% of your energy into how you can be a better mate, and just 20% on how he/she could be less of a jerk. You have little power to change your partner, but great power to change yourself. Take maximum personal responsibility for whatever is true in your partner's complaints, and then unilaterally make appropriate changes. That will make you feel good about yourself, give you the best odds of getting better behavior from your mate, and put you on the high moral ground.
- Empathy - Try to get inside your partner's skin, sensing the being behind the words - and ask firmly for the same. Isn't that why you married each other, that you felt deeply known and listened to? Being empathic doesn't mean you agree or approve or let someone off the hook, just that you understand. And when you understand, you're more able to address what's *really* at stake for the other person. And when you feel understood, you're more willing to get to the heart of the matter and make peace.

- Solutions Focus - Go after what would make things better from now on rather than argue about the past. Be honest with yourself: what are you up to, making a case for why you're right, or making things better in your relationship? Pick a topic and stick with it without jumping around. Then make realistic agreements, keep them, and move on.
- Loving At Will - Life is hard for all of us, and we all suffer in a variety of ways, so each of us is called to bring compassion and lovingkindness to other people - even the person we're married to! This both makes us quietly happy and helps the world be a better place. While love may not be top of mind in the midst of a nutty day, any one of us can use the will to reach down inside and pull up a little love. Giving it ennobles us, lifts our own heart, brings dignity and self-respect . . . and often kindles a fire of love in return.

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