

hitched

advice

Tell Your Spouse How You Really Feel

Building the courage to get things off your chest is the hardest part.

BY DR. NOELLE NELSON



BigStockPhoto

When communicating with your spouse, it's better to not hold back.

Some couples seem to have no trouble saying exactly what's on their minds. They are able to express their hurt feelings or anger directly and confront their spouses easily and comfortably.

But for many of us, expressing hurt or angry feelings or saying something you think might hurt or anger your mate is very difficult. You fear your partner's reaction and you're afraid of either hurting their feelings or making them angry.

The upshot is you take your feelings and try to squash them, either by minimizing them, pretending they don't exist or you

end up expressing your feelings inappropriately. Since none of these methods really work, you're stuck with unresolved feelings. You end up unhappy or frustrated and most certainly, in pain.

Quit holding back! Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In other words, tell *all* of your feelings to your spouse, not just the hurt or angry ones.

1) Start with exactly where you are emotionally with phrases like:

"I'm nervous talking to you about this because I'm afraid you might get angry at me for bringing it up."

"I'm uncomfortable mentioning this because I'm concerned about your feelings, and I don't want to hurt you in any way."

"I'm embarrassed to bring this up because it's difficult for me to comment on someone else's behavior, but it's important to me to try to talk about this."

"This is difficult for me to talk about because I'm not comfortable talking about personal things, but it's important for me to share it with you, even though I'm scared you may not like what you hear."

2) Wait to see how your mate responds to you.

If your spouse responds, as most people will, with something along the lines of, "Well, okay, I don't know how I'll feel about it, but I'll try to listen to you," say whatever it is you have to say. Clearly, they still may not like what you disclose, but they are prepared to hear something potentially unpleasant and therefore are less likely to be highly reactive. If they have expressed a willingness to communicate, then you have a good possibility of resolving the issue or at least being heard.

If your spouse says "Well, if I get angry, I get angry, tough!" then don't continue to disclose further feelings. This may not be a good time to discuss things. Perhaps your spouse is already upset and frustrated about something else. If

that's the case, you're better off bringing up the subject when he or she is calm and in a good place.

Interestingly enough, you take better care of yourself by putting your fears upfront and owning them than you would by keeping them inside. Shying away from difficult or painful feelings only hurts you in the end. Have the courage to state your fears and you'll see that resolving your issues becomes much easier.

Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D. is a psychologist, consultant, speaker and author. Her most recent book is "The Power of Appreciation in Everyday Life" (Insomniac Press, 2006). Her new book, "Men Are Wonderful" (Free Press) will be released in January 2009. For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives through appreciation—at work, at home and in relationships. For more than a decade, she has helped people live happier, healthier lives through appreciation--at work, at home and in relationships. E-mail: nnelson@dr.noellenelson.com, website: www.noellenelson.com.