

life advice

Marriage: Remember the Good Times to Get Through the Bad

With such intimate knowledge of your partner, it's easy to say hurtful things. These tips will help keep their good qualities top-of-mind.

BY DR. NOELLE NELSON

The argument has reached its boiling point. It's degenerated into an outright fight, and here you both are launching, "this is just like that time you" grenades at each other—the original reason for the argument is hardly relevant at this point. It's "gotcha" time, and knowing each other as well as you do, you're hitting those "gotcha" buttons with unerring, hurtful precision.

No surprise that nothing gets resolved. Bad feelings abound. Another layer of resentment is built up between the two of you. Your closeness erodes.

It's so easy to lose sight of the good times—of your spouse's good qualities—in the midst of the bad times. You're certainly not going to reminisce about that wonderfully indulgent romantic weekend you spent with your spouse while you're arguing over money, the kids or whatever else. And yet, if you're to have a successful resolution to the argument, reminding yourself of the good times, especially of the good qualities of your mate, is essential.

The best way to remember your spouse's good qualities is not in the heat of the battle. Instead, when things are good between you, deliberately make a list of everything you appreciate about your mate. Tape the list up on your bathroom mirror, or wherever else you will see it often. If your mate sees it and wonders about it, so much the better. Say to him/her something like, "I love thinking about everything I like about you." Hard for your spouse to object to such a loving desire!

Do the same thing with your marriage. Jot down all the wonderful things you appreciate about your marriage, your life together and the joys you share. Put that up in a prominent place for easy viewing as well.

As you notice these good qualities day by day, your awareness of them will grow. Then, when you're in the beginning throes of what looks like an argument, you can more readily stop yourself and say something along the lines of, "This isn't who we are. I'm going to take a moment—a time out—to remember who we really are, and calm myself down. Then perhaps we can talk about this issue/problem again—without fighting."

No, it won't stop all conflict. Of course you'll still argue. But you may find, over time, that you discuss more and argue less, with less unfortunate painful consequences to your marriage.

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