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life advice

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Avoid Panic In Your Marriage

Take a step back and use some problem solving skills to deter unwanted stress.

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If you don't base your emotions on reality, you could find yourself bound to your worst fears.

Your sweetheart of a wife, who may have her faults, but who generally seems appreciative of you and how you help around the house, suddenly starts finding fault with everything you do. She grumbles and grouses at you no matter what the occasion. She fusses about how poorly you mowed the lawn, didn't line up the trash barrels properly, forgot her mom's new husband's birthday, and on and on.

She suddenly objects to behaviors she never even mentioned before: that you keep her awake with your snoring (she used to find it soothing), and wore mismatched socks last Tuesday (she used to find it cute). She has you so confused and discombobulated that you're grinding your teeth at night, seriously considering moving to the couch and wondering, "Who are you and what have you done with my wife?"

Or maybe it's your husband, an ordinarily kind and loving person, who starts snapping at you, complaining about this and that, and responding with aggravation to just about anything you do. You panic, "Oh my gosh, he doesn't love me anymore, that's it. He's having an affair! I've got to win him back." And off you go to buy that new outfit, crash-diet 20 pounds, dye your hair and join a gym.

In and of themselves, all of which are perfectly fine things to do, and maybe they would even help "the problem." But at this point, you are really just wildly flailing about trying to grab onto anything that might bring you relief from the growing *panic* you feel inside.

Dealing with panic consists of being able to recognize panic for what it is—a *feeling* of being out of control, but not the *reality* of being out of control, and then going on to problem solve.

Don't let the feeling of panic drag you in all different directions. Stop, take a deep breath and use these tips to help survey the situation.

* Take stock of the situation.

Ask yourself, "What in my behavior might be provoking such a response? What in my partner's reality might generate this kind of behavior?" Too often, when people view a situation they only look at how they contribute or only look at how the other person is contributing. Instead, take a balanced approach.

* Don't place blame.

Ask your husband or wife what's going on without putting blame on yourself or them. Say, for example: "I'm confused. I've noticed that you seem to be upset a lot lately and I'm not sure why." Or, "I'm concerned. You don't seem to be happy lately. What's up?" Let your spouse take it from there. More often than not, you will find that your partner's behavior has nothing to do with you. And if it does, you now have a concrete reality from which to devise a solution.

It's time you put the panic aside and stop adding unwanted stress in your life. Take stock and problem solve! It's infinitely more successful and rewarding than feeling powerless and out of control.

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