

Very few people actually like conflict. They may like the outcome when they “win” an argument but I don’t think they enjoy the negative effects on their partner.

If you “win” an argument, do you think your partner feels closer to you? More emotionally connected? Better about the trajectory of the relationship?

If arguments are so hazardous, doesn’t it seem logical to avoid them at all costs?

Well, that is the philosophy of a large percentage of couples. Their attitude is, “I can’t see any good that comes from arguing, so why do it?”

That approach earns a certain respect from me in that these couples seem able to do what I am unable to do with my wife Ellyn: avoid arguments at all costs. At certain times, I simply know I am right about something and a part of me is willing to pay the price to convince her of it.

I personally believe avoiding conflict at all costs pays a potential higher toll.

If I’m a conflict avoider I must keep censoring or over-compromising around my wants, feelings, or beliefs.

Conflict avoiders choose to live in a relationship with the brakes on. They believe if they take the brakes off they will push their partner away or not make space for others. They will end up feeling alone. AND they have proof that speaking up has bad results. So they will do what they can to avoid that pain in the future.

They will be pleasant, smile and wave, keep relationship negativity to themselves, and take pride in never fighting.

When I see conflict avoiders in my practice I explain the importance of taking risks to speak up, asking questions to go deeper in conversations. I encourage them to ask their partner what is bothering them – and then ask more questions to find out more. All of this is met with a pleasant smile and nod of the head.

I continue, saying their relationship would have more life in it if they'd take risks to show affection and appreciation, and include the partner in decision making. I add a description about the price they pay for choking off the spontaneous urges to avoid getting a "no." Then I conclude that their time on this planet is too precious to live it in the emotional equivalent of a tiny town and never venturing beyond the familiar borders.

They say it makes sense. They want more passion in their relationship. That's often what brings them to my office in the first place. They agree they should take some emotional risks, be more assertive, and take more initiative.

And that's about as far as it goes.

They sit quietly and wait for the magic – growth without risk or effort.

Sometimes I can reach the part of them that no longer chooses to play forever in the shallow end of the pool. The part of them that has longed to go to the deeper end and jump off the diving boards. Make big splashes and a lot of noise. And we have fun getting there.

And sometimes they are not ready and that is OK with me as well. Part of my evolution is accepting that choice and not imposing my values on them. That is an argument I cannot win.

But I can at least encourage couples to think of conflict as an opportunity to strengthen a

relationship and discover something new about themselves or their partner. It is one way to create more passion and connection.

If you'd like to do better with difficult discussions, try our one hour audio session to learn an innovative approach for discussion challenging topics. Click [Safe and Sane Couples Communications](#) for more information or to order.

Until next time,

Pete Pearson