



# KEEPING *the peace*

HAVING A FIGHT-FREE RELATIONSHIP IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK, WRITES **LINDY ALEXANDER**.

It is generally accepted that a happy marriage is good for your health. As a 2013 study published in the *Journal of Family Psychology* found, happily married people have better mental and physical health than their unmarried peers.

The road to divorce, however, is paved with arguments, says Fawn Weaver, author of *The Argument-Free Marriage*. "If you are slamming doors and going to bed not speaking to each other, that impacts your entire life," she says. Creating a fight-free household is possible, but it takes time and patience. There are, however, some simple ways to move towards a harmonious relationship without all the drama.

## Define your family values

Our values are integral to how we behave and what we believe, but it can be hard to identify them until we experience periods of conflict or stress. However, Weaver says couples can minimise arguments by having a discussion early in their relationship

about what convictions they share about what works in their household. Defining your family values means having a common vision and a shared understanding of what is important in your lives.

**Put a value on it:** What are the core values of your relationship? Talk about your individual values starting with sex, money, housework and child-rearing.

## Start a daily ritual

After speaking to hundreds of happily married couples throughout the world, Weaver stumbled upon a commonality. From a morning walk together to opening the curtains and watching the city lights blink on, all the couples had a daily ritual.

"After realising the importance of a daily ritual, my husband and I started having a coffee hour," Weaver says. "Sometimes we have a coffee hour in 20 minutes, but the important thing is we're doing something every day to connect and to talk, without any pressure about what the conversation is."

**Start a trend:** A daily ritual doesn't have to be elaborate. Choose a simple activity to do with your partner every day, such as time on the couch with the TV off or when the kids are in bed.

## What most arguments are really about

Our own self-interest causes most arguments, says Weaver. "It's human nature to think, 'It's all about me', [but] we fall into the trap of wanting to create ourselves in our spouse," she says. "We want them to do things the way we like and to think the way we think, but that just doesn't work." The answer is straightforward but requires practice: surrender the belief that your partner needs to do everything your way.

**The rules of engagement:** It's unlikely that your partner annoys or upsets you on purpose, so presume innocence. Be curious and ask them about their reasons for acting in a particular way.

## The No. 1 reason for marital strife

The stress of managing finances causes more arguments than any other issue, says Weaver. "Money is consistently the source of so many problems. If you can sort out your finances, then you can deal with everything else." Have a frank conversation about what you really need to spend your money on. "If you and your spouse were the only two people on earth, would you care about what kind of house, car or TV you have?" Weaver asks. Work out your household's monthly "needs" versus "wants" and you will be on your way to a financially secure marriage, with fewer arguments.

**Money matters:** How do you and your partner approach money? Know how much is coming in and, if necessary, set specific goals to get out of debt.

## Release your expectations of perfection

It is usually our expectations of perfection in others that fail us, not the actual people. "When you expect perfection from yourself, you end up expecting it from your spouse and they are never going to be perfect," Weaver says. Recognising and appreciating your differences is crucial to a harmonious relationship. "If you and your spouse are identical, then one of you is unnecessary," says Weaver. "Do we think so highly of ourselves that we want our spouses to be just like us?" **Accept and adapt:** What made you choose your partner? Talk about how your differences complement and frustrate each other.

## MY DAY ON A PLATE

**Evan Kennedy, 45**  
Overnight truck driver



**8PM** Before my working day begins in the evening, I have a meal at home of chicken or fish with rice or potatoes and vegetables.

Staying hydrated is important for concentration while driving, so over a shift I drink about five 600ml bottles of water flavoured with apple and blackcurrant cordial.

**11.30PM** A Milo and milk with a couple of non-sugar sweeteners.

**3AM** A couple of plain biscuits or nuts and cashews, as they're easy to eat while driving.

**7AM** A protein shake while the truck is reloaded for the return trip.

**8.30AM** On the way back I'll have some fruit, usually a banana or an apple, or a fruit salad.

**10.30AM** After I've finished and come home, I'll have another meal of grilled chicken or fish. Or perhaps some bacon – the rindless kind with no fat – and a couple of eggs.

## Dr Joanna McMillan says:

**Top marks for...**

Steering clear of highly processed snacks, such as confectionery and chips, which are all too easy to eat on the road. Your nut and fruit snacks are ideal, and while I prefer real food over protein shakes, in your case this is a good on-the-go option.

**If you keep eating like this you'll...**

Hopefully avoid the gradual yearly weight gain that affects so many drivers due to the sedentary nature of the job. However, building some activity into your day is essential for your overall health.

**Why don't you try...**

Boosting fibre intake by choosing brown rice or another wholegrain, eating the skins on your potatoes and adding baked beans to your bacon and eggs. And up your veggie intake by ensuring you have half a plate at each of your main meals.