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What happens after conflict?

A number of us are scared of conflict. Whilst this might be due to several reasons, one of the main difficulties, in my experience, is that of not being confident enough that ruptures in the relationship can be safely and adequately repaired. Yet, the ability to repair feelings following an argument is essential to ensure that relationships survive the highs and lows of daily life.

In particular, this ability helps minimise the development of resentment and contempt, which, according to Gottman, a prominent relationships researcher, is at the core of relationship breakdown.

Several ways could help us become better at reparation following conflict. When discussing issues, it is imperative that we speak about our own experience, as opposed to attributing blame onto the other person. Criticising the other person might lead them to feel attacked, generating an attitude of defensiveness that obviously does not aid clarification and repair.

Another suggestion is to start conversations with a soft and curious tone, rather than adopting a sarcastic or contemptuous approach. Giving labels to the other person is also damaging, as are statements that suggest that the other person is 'always' something or other. For instance, saying to our partner, 'You always get your way', or 'You never consider my feelings', are sure ways of generating

defensiveness in the other person. On the other hand, clearly giving the person the sense that we love them and simply wish to clear the air, would give the message that no weapons are needed for the conversation. This includes laying off such non-verbal communication as eye-rolling and deep sighs.

A trusting relationship is a place where vulnerability is taken care of and nourished. Whenever our partner or spouse discloses something to us, or shares their need or desire for us, it is essential that we do not attempt to gain power over them by using what they said to attack them or belittle them. Safety in a relationship is the key for marriage success, and can easily be damaged if a partner has to fear words being flung back at them during a dispute.

It goes without saying that conversation during a conflict has to be managed well. Should we not be confident enough that we are able to sufficiently manage our emotions so as not act them out, it is then advisable that we take some time out. This would give both partners the time to calm down and collect their thoughts so that then they can have a more meaningful dialogue later on. Bear in mind that hurtful words cannot be taken back, and nor can ultimatums. Ultimately, they reduce the crucial feeling of safety in the relationship, engendering longer-term feelings of bitterness and caution.

This does not mean that we are not

