



Photo: Everton Vila on www.unsplash.com

assertive when we have been hurt by the other person. However, we can try to respond from a place of love and care, rather than anger and attack. Sometimes, it is necessary that we try and identify the feelings behind the other person's behaviour. For instance, the other person might not have told us about something that happened at work so they do not worry us. Whilst this might not necessarily excuse the action, it certainly gives a different perspective to our assumption that the person is concealing things from us. Such understanding leads to an altered starting point to the conversation. It also facilitates a dialogue whereby both partners' needs can be negotiated, rather than one's needs 'winning' over the other.

In fact, discussions need to be approached with a problem-solving attitude, rather than a competitive one. Avoid trying to prove a point. This distracts us from that which our partner is trying to say to us, and obviously leads us to respond from our own point of view, rather than seeking to understand both our and our partner's reality. It is crucial to listen to our partner's requests and ask for clarification on issues that are unclear. We need to give our partner the benefit of the doubt. Discuss expectations to avoid misunderstandings. Additionally, conversation with our partner needs to be productive, rather than an attempt at shutting them down or criticising them.

Once both partners have calmed down

sufficiently following an argument, it is worth having a brief recovery conversation. At this point, our focus needs to centre on collaboration, listening, building intimacy, and restoring safety and goodwill. At this point, it is crucial that we do not rekindle the dispute. Rather than focusing on weaknesses, we can spend our energy on fostering a deeper connection. It is worth making it a habit to engage in gestures of love and to demonstrate warmth and acceptance. Ideally, we need to look for, and express, gratitude in our words and actions.

Unfortunately, not all conflict can be resolved. However, Gottman suggests that not all unsolvable issues within a relationship are deal breakers. In instances when a dispute cannot be solved, managing feelings is crucial. It is worth learning to express feelings when we are struggling. This includes asking the other person to hold us or to reassure us of their love. With practice, we do become better at repairing feelings following a conflict. We might want to express the fact that, despite feeling angry, we do not want to hurt the other person.

Couples who discuss concerns in a timely and respectful way and adopt a 'we're in this together' mindset have a better chance of creating a happy, long-lasting relationship. They develop resilience, and are likely to not let anger destroy the loving feelings and affection that brought them together in the first place.

