

Negotiating the relationship minefield

When you're in love and think you've found the right person for you, maybe even the partner of your dreams, everything feels right with the world, so naturally you'll always agree with each other...

If the perfect picture starts to blur, you need to know about negotiation.

Inevitably there will be differences of opinion in a relationship, no matter how perfect, so it's important to learn the art of relationship negotiation.

If you want your opinions listened to, you must be prepared to listen to other people's opinions.

Let them know you've heard and understood what they said. You don't have to agree with them, but it's important to listen first. Then make it clear you expect them to listen to you.

Negotiation is an equal process whereby each person believes the other will really *listen*.

Basic courtesy applies. As soon as emotions are involved, it's much harder to respect the other.

When emotions run high your ability to hear someone else is blocked. If you feel angry you will want to react to what you're hearing, rather than listen and reflect on what is being said.

Calm your emotions and make a time to negotiate later, when emotions are more under control.

If you've tried to do this many times and never seemed to achieve it, you may need outside help, which is where professional counselling comes in.

Choosing the right setting for negotiation is important. It should be somewhere neutral – and timing is vital. It's no good starting negotiation if one person is off doing something and the other is preoccupied with something else.

An appropriate place and time might be on home ground when there are no distractions, or at a local coffee shop or restaurant.

Mutual respect is a necessity for successful negotiation – not always easy when the two of you violently disagree on an issue.

But try to remember you don't have to think or feel the same as your partner to be able to understand their view.

As soon as you start having feeling contempt for the other person, your relationship is in danger and you should seek professional help.

That applies to all family relationships. For instance, never criticise your partner's parenting methods in front of the children. Parents must sort out their own disagreements first and present a united front when dealing with issues involving the children.

Kids have the ability to play their parents off against each other, so never give them the power to divide and conquer.

Dealing with teenagers is wearing and requires constant negotiation. Just remember, nobody gets it right all the time. At times your best efforts at negotiation will fail and you'll feel disappointed. But more issues will be resolved. So it's a positive overall result.

Some issues will go on forever, and need constant re-visiting, but that's fine. All people differ – that's just the way things are in our imperfect world. No couple or family can negotiate every issue through to a successful resolution – except perhaps TV's *The Brady Bunch*. But we're talking real families here, not fantasy ones.

If two people genuinely want to negotiate, they will, though they may need counselling to learn effective negotiation. Where there's a will, there's a way.

Survival tips

- **Even a perfect relationship will have differences of opinion. That's normal**
- **Everyone can learn effective negotiation techniques**
- **Never try and negotiate when you're angry. Calm down first**
- **Negotiation is an equal process where both partners must be respectful of each other**
- **Understanding is critical. It doesn't necessarily mean agreement.**