

Dialogue isn't for problem solving...

How does it help if we DO have an issue to discuss?

by Marge & Con Terr

If we aren't supposed to use dialogue for problem solving, how does dialogue help us when we have a problem in our relationship?

Good question.

There is a serious temptation to formulate a dialogue question that is meant to "enlighten" the other, or bring him around to see things my way. This, of course, is manipulation, but that's such a nasty-sounding word.

If I (Marge) am fuming about housework, I might flop into a chair with my notebook and propose, "How do I feel when I do all the work around here?" Which, does bring out a lot of strong feelings but funny thing, it doesn't seem to help us become better lovers!

So, how can I bring up a touchy subject in a way that will encourage honest, loving communication?

In this example, what if I propose instead, "How do I feel about the condition of our home?" We can each share feelings about the continuum of messiness, disrepair, or Better-Homes-and-Gardens-ness of our little nest, without stomping each other and perpetuating the tension.

I can share my feelings, and these are not opinions of his behavior. Using "I" statements, such as "I feel discouraged and overwhelmed when I think there's a lot of work to do," help Con to understand why I look like I a Mr. Clean hit-and-run victim. He won't be as shocked when I'm angry with the kids over their latest glitter and spray paint art project in the living room.

I (Con) share my feelings of gratitude and comfort at seeing that our house isn't a slip-covered showcase.

When I wrote, "Our house makes me feel welcome, like I can relax. I'm not afraid to play with the kids on the floor or put my feet up and read the paper once in awhile. My feeling of comfort and welcome is like smelling the brownies you bake to surprise me, or like suddenly finding a friend at a party where I don't know anyone," Marge comes to know that I actually find relief in not having everything picture-perfect.

We were able to talk about the feelings and explore what we knew were very real differences in our attitudes toward house-work. We didn't have to fight about who's doing all the chores or who leaves the place a mess.

When I, Con, begin to feel the despair that my Sweetheart is experiencing as she faces the work, I begin to look for and ask her for ways that I can help her. I feel her despair and it affects me, even though I don't have the same feelings about the condition of the house

When I, Marge, shared my difficult feelings, it was a relief just to be listened to. I

When I am anxious, worried, grieving or angry about a situation, I need to bring it up first in terms of my feelings.

didn't try to complain and make him work more. I was pleasantly surprised that he wanted to take more responsibility just because it matters to me.

I already knew he didn't really care if the place was a mess - that's why this is a difficult topic. I can come out spoiling for a fight, ready to argue that he should help, or I can tell him how I'm feeling and let him love me.

Once we shared the feelings, I was less apprehensive about asking for his help. When he knows how much it means to me, he's ready to jump in whenever I ask. I still don't know why he doesn't care if the place is a mess, though...

Dialogue on the Feelings!

When I have a serious issue to discuss, what would help me the most? How do I feel telling you this?

What is one thing I would like to try differently when we have an issue to discuss? How do I feel about that?

How did I feel about the last time we solved a problem together?

What is the area that is most difficult for me to discuss with you? What feelings come up for me?

When you bring up a topic for discussion how do I feel'?

Use many different descriptions of your feelings:

Name the feeling.

What does it feel like physically?

What does it make you want to do?

What image does it bring to mind?

Was there a time you experienced this feeling in the past or as a child?

Is there a song, movie scene or setting in nature that it reminds you of?

What would it sound like or smell like - what color would it be?

What is the intensity - is it barely noticeable, or is it overpowering?