

Want to stop bickering with your partner? Try this instead

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When I was in my early twenties I was in a relationship. Let's call the guy, Jared.

We had the kind of attraction that was almost caustic in nature. Despite caring deeply about each other, we'd argue about everything and anything under the sun – from who left the milk out to whether or not Tony Danza is actually a good actor. We were that overdramatic couple prone to public screaming matches that everyone hated being around. A healthy relationship, it was not.

I wrote off the time I spent with Jared as yet another romantic misstep from my twenties. When people would ask what happened between us, I would explain, "He was crazy. I was crazy. The whole relationship was crazy." However, according to the new book by award-winning psychotherapist Dr. Deborah Sandella, *Goodbye Hurt and Pain*, what was lacking from our relationship wasn't sanity – it was emotional intelligence.

As Sandella explains, emotional intelligence – the ability to understand who we are as emotional beings, while being able to control and manage these feelings in a healthy way – is an important part of any relationship.

"Given all the feelings we must navigate together and separately, it seems a bit of a miracle that anyone can get together and stay together," says Sandella. "But when a couple's combined emotional intelligence is higher, their relationship has more depth, less conflict, and fewer negative qualities—all making them more likely to stay together."

But, when both people in a relationship are lacking emotional intelligence, "it's very possible that they're not going to have the wisdom to slow down, understand each other and communicate to work things through," she says. In this case, you're going to get a couple where everything leads to a pure emotional reaction (see above re: screaming matches about who left the milk out).

As a culture we're taught that feelings like anger and jealousy are "bad" which is often why we try and sweep them under the rug. But, when we ignore our feelings, we don't become emotionally smarter. "When we're angry we don't feel love," Sandella points out.

If you don't process anger well as a couple, "it's like piling layers of garbage on top of the love and attraction," says Sandella.

Luckily, Sandella has one thing couples can do to save their relationship: practice emotional self-disclosure.

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Painful early life experiences play out in our adult relationships causing us to behave in certain ways. The only way to break through that flaming emotional garbage pile is by talking about your feelings with your partner so you can get a better understanding of where they're coming from – even if it feels uncomfortable.

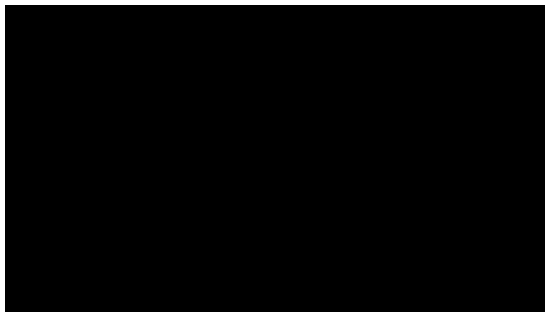
So, what does emotional self-disclosure look like in real life? It means planning a date night with your partner and telling them, "We're going to be emotionally intimate tonight," says Sandella. The only rule: "Don't judge or question your partner's feelings, it's just about listening," says Sandella.

I can't help but wonder how differently some of my relationships would have played out, if only I'd known to prioritize emotional self-disclosure with my ex-partners. Perhaps I would have felt comfortable sharing with Jared why his yelling bothered me so much (witnessing my parents' fights as a child) or discovered why just the mention of Tony Danza bothered him so much (his parents would always ignore him during episodes of Who's the Boss). After all, with self-disclosure comes more emotional intelligence.

The good news? You don't have to be emotional geniuses to have a great relationship. "To sustain a relationship you only need one person who has enough emotional intelligence that allows them to be tolerant, set their ego aside and be compassionate with their partner," says Sandella.

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