

# Healthy relationships

It might seem strange, but recent research suggests conflict may actually be good for our health and our relationships. Can this be true?

Researchers at the University of Michigan found that living longer appears to correlate with expression of anger in relationships. Bottling up anger seems to lead to resentment, which in turn, maintains the problem. So what's the answer, fight more? It's not that simple.

Research published in the Journal of Family Issues suggests the level of conflict you experience now will not change over the course of your marriage. They also found that couples in low-conflict relationships were happy, more likely to be involved in joint decision making and less likely to divorce. So fighting is clearly not the answer.

It seems it's not just how couples fight but how they recover from a fight that's important. A study at the University of Minnesota found partners who were more securely attached as infants to their caregivers were better at recovering from conflict in later life. This suggests we learn to regulate negative emotions as adults by the example shown to us as children.

However, we can learn as adults too and a person who wasn't securely attached as a child can be influenced by a partner who was and who therefore recovers well from conflicts. Their influence encourages their partner not to dwell on negative thoughts and emotions and in doing so, the couple are more likely to stay together.

But there is more to staying together than conflict style. According to scholars at Brigham Young University, a major predictor of marriage stability and relationship quality, is the importance placed on money and material possessions in a relationship.

Partners who are both materialistic are more likely to have an unstable marriage due to poor communication, conflict resolution and low responsiveness to each other and are more likely to be in poorer shape physically.

So perhaps the key to a happy, healthy relationship is to spend more time communicating with each other and less time worrying about money. Conflict really isn't the answer!

## MORE INFORMATION

Managing conflict requires understanding and skill, which can be helped by couples / relationship therapy. For more details contact your local First Psychology Centre.

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