

made for you by
Amity



The little book of

Relationship Care

by Kate Nicolle and Emily Nickson Williams

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Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council



About us

This book has been written by us, Kate and Emily, we're Amity and we are relationship experts. We care A LOT about people having strong, thriving relationships.

Infact, we believe that good quality relationships are a right not a privilege. We think that relationships are the most important thing in the world because they can make us feel happier, safer and more loved. They can also make us feel lonely, sad and sometimes anxious. That's why we think that relationship care is something we should all pay attention to.

What is relationship care?

It's simple really. Relationship care is about looking after the relationships you have with the people in your life who are important to you, in the same way that you might focus on the care of your physical and mental health.

If you want to know more about what we do:

www.weareamity.co.uk

We hope you find our little book useful,

Kate & Emily

Hello, welcome to Amity's Little Book of Relationship Care

This is a little guide that has been put together by the relationship experts at Amity. We have made this so you can have a think about the relationship with your partner whether that be your husband, wife, girlfriend or boyfriend. We want to support you to make your relationship stronger during difficult times!

How can this help me?

We have all faced more challenges in recent times and therefore things might be difficult right now between you and your partner. You might be arguing more than you usually do, or your arguments might be worse than they normally are.

Life can be really stressful and when we are stressed we might argue more and find it more difficult to resolve those arguments. This little guide will give you some tips on what to do and how to cope during times of stress. This will make your relationship stronger.

Is arguing that bad?

Arguing is perfectly normal – let's just get that out of the way! We all argue, it's part of being a human. But what if your arguments are loud, frequent or you feel like all the arguments you have keep re-occurring?

That's when it can be difficult for you and your partner (and any children you care for). When we argue and we don't resolve it very well it can make us and our children feel really fed up and for lots of people (especially children) can lead to feelings of anxiety.

This book is going to help you to think about how you respond to each other when you argue and how you can influence in a positive way what happens next. You get to choose what happens next by making better decisions, by thinking about how you acknowledge each other and show respect.

Throughout the booklet there is a theme of 5. It can take 5 minutes to reflect on a situation and think about how to respond to it in a productive way.

This booklet is not about taking opportunities to criticise or blame each other, neither is it about establishing who is the better partner!

So start as you mean to go on and try to approach this time of reflection as a chance to take steps towards a healthier, stronger relationship. In turn this will give your child/ren the opportunity to learn how to do the same for themselves. This is one of the best life skills you can give them. When children are surrounded by healthy relationships as they grow up they develop the skills required for healthy relationships of their own.



What do people argue about?

Couples argue about anything and everything. Have a look at this image. Do you recognise the issues here? These are the common things that everyone finds tricky.

See if you can pick 5 things that are the cause of arguments in your relationship. It's good to know what the problem is so you can be clear about it. You might not have 5 main things that you argue about it could just be one or two.

Let's think about something positive!

5 things that make your relationship work

Have you ever stopped to think about what makes your relationship work? It's important to recognise the individuality of your relationship.

What makes you tick as a couple, what makes your bond special?

Why does it work, the two of you being together?



Reflect on the this, it's valuable to recognise and appreciate your strengths as a couple. Even when you feel like a lot of the time you are arguing, you will have strengths as a couple that you can identify. You have made it this far as a couple and when you look back you will be able to identify times that have been stressful but you have had to dig deep to manage. So, build on the strength your relationship already has, even if at times you don't feel that your bond is strong.

It is easy to overlook what makes you work when you are just focusing on what doesn't. So have a think together about what these 5 things are. Eg: We share the same sense of humour. We have a similar past etc

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Celebrate the relationship you have built, why not? being in a relationship is not easy and never perfect.

Knowledge is power!

The better you understand why you work as a couple the more power you have to deal with the difficult times when they come along.

Exploring what happens and why when things don't work so well is equally as important, it's the power you both need to repair things between you when rupture happens.



What happens when we get angry?

Everyone gets angry. Thoughts happen in our head and feelings happen in our heart. We don't often explore however, what is really going on. We show a behaviour through our anger but beneath that is what is really going on in our hearts which is how we really feel.

The real reason why you are angry

Your head says you are angry, your heart says you feel cross or disappointed and that is making you feel angry. So, what is seen by a partner is anger and that anger is what they respond to. But they are not responding to the real reason are they? That could stay a mystery unless you talk about your feelings.

Spend 5 minutes thinking about the feelings that cause you to be angry. You might be angry about something that happened that is nothing to do with them but your partner might think you are angry with them.

So what should I do instead?

The best thing to do is explain to your partner what really made your anger erupt. It works both ways, if your partner is angry then a good idea is to say *"I can see that you are angry, what is it that is making you so angry?"*



5 things you can do when you are feeling wound up by your arguments

Here are 5 top tips to try

- 1 Let your partner know that you need some time out and go for a walk
- 2 Take some deep breaths, go somewhere quiet and calm down for 20 minutes
- 3 If you feel as if you are going round in circles, agree to stop the conversation and talk later
- 4 If you feel that your partner isn't listening, press the pause button and give them a few minutes uninterrupted to say how they feel – and then you do the same. Both try to really listen even if you don't like what they are saying.
- 5 Offer reassurance by saying something like "I do want to sort this out and I care about you but I think we need to talk when we are less angry with each other".

How children are affected by arguments

Children do not understand adult problems.

All babies, children and young people need to feel safe and secure at home. These are the most basic things we can do for any children that we are bringing up. When you argue with your partner or someone else it can make them feel as if they have done something wrong. Children can cope with some level of arguing as long as those arguments are dealt with in a respectful way.

Helpful and unhelpful ways of arguing:

Have a look at this image - how many of the unhealthy behaviours do you use? Next time you are arguing why not try using the behaviours on the healthy side. Little changes will make a big difference and how you personally behave is a great place to start.



Healthy

- ACKNOWLEDGING
- CALM
- FOCUS ON TOPIC
- NO BLAMING
- FIND A SOLUTION
- SHOW RESPECT

OR



Unhealthy

- SHOUTING/ SWEARING
- TRYING TO WIN
- MAKE PERSONAL COMMENTS
- DON'T LISTEN
- NO RESOLUTION
- LACK FOCUS

5 things our children think and feel when we argue

When in the middle of arguing with your partner it can be easy to forget that there is nearly always some kind of impact on your child when you do so and it's not going to be positive if your arguing is unhealthy. Thinking about the experience your child is having may not feel comfortable but many people find it a great motivator for change. No one chooses for their child to have a bad experience because of something they have done.

You can choose to do things differently, to keep in mind your child's needs and what they are being exposed to, is it healthy or unhealthy? If you're able to be honest, what things do you think your children think and feel when they see you arguing or know that there has been an argument? Eg; they probably feel anxious and unsure of what might happen next



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Let's have a think about what you might like to do to improve your relationship

5 things we would like to improve about our relationship

Strong healthy relationships are ones that are always changing along with the changes we face in life. Relationships are about making progress together not trying to create perfection. Perfect relationships are a myth. Couples who are able to feel content together have built into their relationship **compassion** and **kindness**.

What is your understanding and experience of compassion and kindness? What difference do you think they make?

What is empathy? Empathy is trying your best to see things from another person's perspective, to stand in their shoes and try to respect, recognise and understand what it is they are experiencing.

Let's say you didn't mind being in lockdown, but your partner did. You were happy to watch telly and have the perfect excuse not to be sociable. Your partner on the other hand was really struggling with the lack of social contact with others and the endless zoom calls...



It is easy to forget to be curious about what is going on for your partner. Familiarity can cause us to become a bit lazy. We stop being curious and we stop making an effort. We assume our relationship is ticking along and looking after itself. But like a car, we need to check the tyres and top up the oil.

So if you think about how your relationship works at the moment. What realistic changes would improve the quality of your relationship?

Eg: stop talking over each other when we are disagreeing on something or try to spend less time on our phones and more time talking or doing things we are both interested in.



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There are lots of things we can do about our arguing

Let's start thinking about what those things are

Think about these three questions in a bit more detail, not only will this help you, it will also help your children. Children pick up on more than we think so of course it's much better if they pick up on the skills of how to argue better than how to have a shouting match!

What happened?

Reflect on what happened, for example - did you get irritated with each other, raise your voices, talk over one another and not listen.... then one of you stormed off?

Why did it happen?

Why was it a falling out rather than a discussion? Did you blame and criticise each other? Were you both defensive and focusing on who is in the wrong rather than how to sort things out?

What could you do differently next time?

Using strategies to help you both reflect on how you behave when you are in conflict, why you behave the way you do and what you could change, would result in more healthy discussions and less falling out.

What happened during our argument?

If you don't want to keep making the same mistakes in the way you communicate, you need to think about how you are doing it. This is not so you can be clearer about who is to blame, it's to help you to make better decisions in the future.



Spend 5 minutes thinking about the following questions.

- What did I say and do?*
- What was my partner thinking and feeling because of what I said and did?*
- What did my partner say and do?*
- What was I thinking and feeling because of that and how did that then make me behave towards them? What did my thoughts and feelings make me do?*
- What effect did all of this have on how the argument developed? It caused what to happen?*
- How did you end up behaving towards each other?*

It can help to take a step away from the situation and think about what might be causing you to disagree with your partner.



Things that might cause you to argue:

- How to parent. We often think our way is the best way and can be inflexible about our partners ideas about how it should be done!
- Stresses at home - money issues, household chores, social media etc.
- Bringing up previous arguments , despite you both saying you are over it.
- Other people getting involved in your relationship or parenting, giving their opinion and taking sides

There are countless reasons why you might argue, most of the time the reasons are linked to stress, if it causes stress it causes arguments!

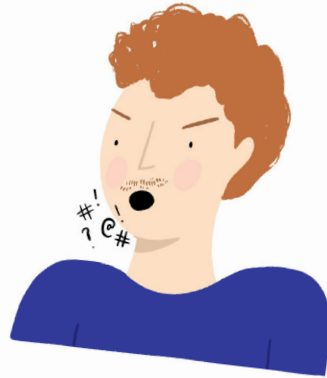
It's really helpful to think about what might be causing each of you to be stressed?



How I behave during an argument

No one is perfect and arguing is a normal part of being human. Think about the kinds of things you do when you are arguing with your partner. Here are some typical things you might do.

- *Shouting*
- *Storming off*
- *Ignoring*
- *Blaming the other person*
- *Eye rolling*
- *Swearing*
- *Crying*
- *Bringing up stuff from ages ago*



Why do you think that these behaviours can be unhelpful?

What could you do instead? Here some other suggestions...

- *Listen to what the other person is saying even if you don't agree*
- *Recognise that you might have done something wrong*
- *See that you need to calm down, so take time out without storming off*
- *Think about how you are going to solve things together*

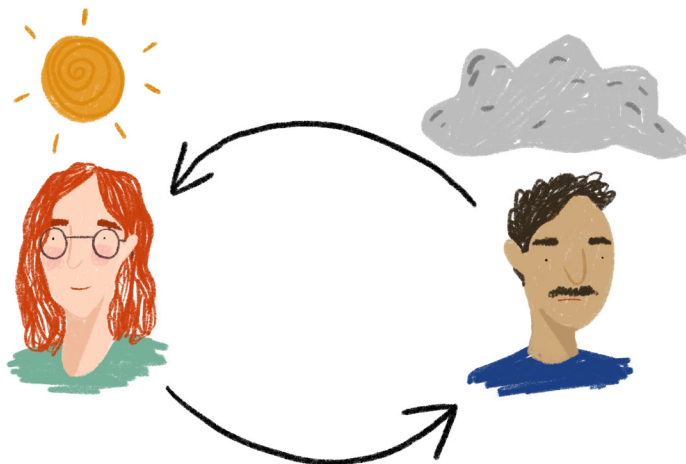
Why did our argument happen?

We are moving on to why did it happen. Why did it spiral into a clash rather than managing to calmly talk the issue through?

There are some obvious things here like, you were tired, had a bad day etc.

But there are often more complex things that can be the reason. Here are things couples often say about why it happens....

- *Because my partner wasn't listening to me*
- *Because they don't understand*
- *Because they think they know what I am thinking and feeling but don't*
- *Because neither of us will take responsibility for our actions and are keen to blame the other*
- *Because they always think they are right*



Who is winning in your relationship?

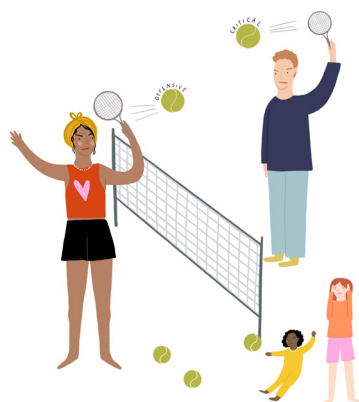
Most people get caught up in who is right and who is wrong. A relationship is not a competition! This happens because couples can get drawn into playing 'toxic tennis'!

Your partner says *"You forgot to put the bins out"* and then you say *"well you forgot to pay the gas bill"*.

You feel like you have won because their mistake is worse than yours! We call this game 'toxic tennis' and it can continue for a while until someone gives up. The problem with this game is that you will feel worse and nothing will be resolved.

If you have children then they are in the audience watching this unhelpful, unhealthy game unfold!

Once you are annoyed with your partner it's easy for this negative feeling to grow and suddenly everything they do gets on your nerves.



The 5 Love Languages

A common mistake many couples make is trying to love their partner in the way in which they would like to be loved....not in the way that their partner wants to be loved. The 5 love languages may help you to understand this better.

The idea is that different people like to be loved in different ways. Are you sure you really know how your partner likes to feel loved by you?

Knowing how your partner likes to feel loved and cared for by you can be the golden ticket to a stronger bond between you.

Spend 5 minutes thinking about your love languages. (Gary Chaman 1992)



Reflect on which love language is yours and think of an example you can give to your partner so they can feel confident that they understand.

Next, find out which one is your partner's and ask them to give you an example so you have clarity too. Now you can move forward with your precious knowledge, knowing how to meet your partner's needs in a way that is best for them...and visa versa!

Simple really, understand your partner better and you have just increased your chances of lasting closeness.

If you carry on trying to show your partner love using your love language rather than theirs, it is easy for you both to become frustrated with each other. Let's think about an example here.

Imagine that your partner often brings home your favourite bar of chocolate or picks up your favourite magazine for you on the way home....but if you are honest what you would really like them to do is spend more time with you, proper time when they are not distracted by their phone or the kids.

It's easy to assume that gifts are kind gestures and being given them should make you feel loved. Gifts are kind gestures but if you want to be loved by the giving of time, whilst gifts are lovely they are not what you need.

This can cause conflict as your partner may feel offended as you don't show you are grateful.

When we understand love languages, we recognise that some arguments happen because we don't know how the other person needs to feel loved.



What you can do differently next time you argue

Here's what everyone in a relationship needs to try to do to make next time better.

Acknowledge

Show your partner respect by acknowledging that you may have said something that upset them or did something that hurt their feelings. Showing that you care enough to recognise that and offer an apology will strengthen your relationship.



As soon as you acknowledge how the other person is feeling they feel heard, feel the respect you are showing them and can start to see that you are trying to repair the situation.

Acknowledge their perspective on the situation and why they might have behaved the way they did.

Use 'I' rather than 'You'

"You never help me tidy the house!"

"I could really do with some help with the tidying"

Which of these would make you feel defensive if said to you?

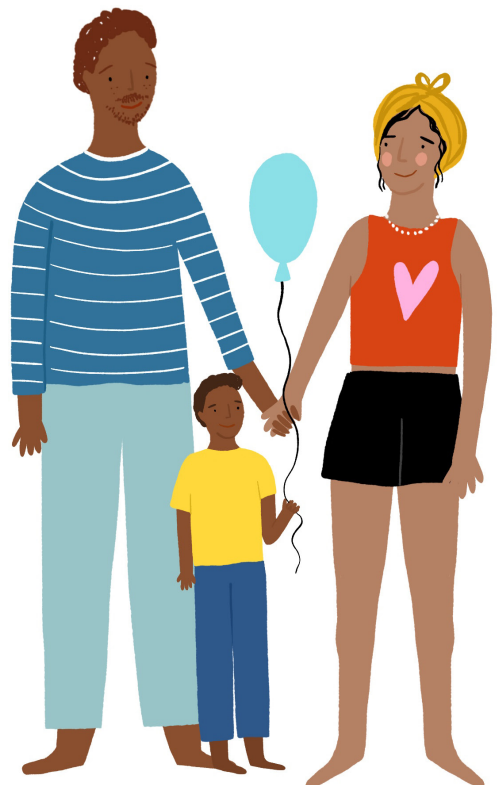
When we say things that begin with 'You' the other person is automatically on the defensive; they feel criticised and blamed. What follows is unlikely to be a positive conversation. If you use 'I' however, you are owning your feelings and sharing them with the other person in a non-confrontational way. You are more likely to have a positive conversation where you both listen to each other rather than get into the Toxic Tennis game.

Make a note to yourself to try and notice how often you say 'You' at the start of a sentence to your partner and how often what follows is positive and how often it is negative.

This is another small win. If you notice that you do a lot of negative 'You's' try to change that. This will help you to start to build a kinder, more compassionate, healthy relationship. And remember your children will be watching and learning from this too.

Here are some examples:

"You always leave the parenting to me!"



Instead how about saying this..

"I am feeling overloaded with the children and I would like if we did it together"

"You spend too much money!"

Instead how about saying this..

"I am feeling really worried about our money can we talk about it?"

How can we try to be more clear about what we need from our partner?

Be clear about what you need

We would all like to say we need an all-expenses paid holiday to the Caribbean, but this is not really what is meant by being clear about what you need.

Think about why you got so cross or upset about a particular issue that caused a disruption between you and your partner.



What do you need now because of it?

- *Do you need a hug?*
- *Some time on your own?*
- *Practical help with the things you've been struggling with?*
- *To hear an apology or acknowledgement?*
- *Do you need them to do a specific task?*
- *Do you need to hear "I love and appreciate you" more often?*

Whatever it is let your partner know. They can't do it if they don't know you need it, they are not mind readers!

Helpful things you can do for your relationship

- **Be kind.** Simple, look for opportunities to say a kind thing or do a kind thing.
- **Show you want to communicate** in a positive way by actually listening to learn not just listening so you can respond.
- Think about your partners **love language** and activate your actions.
- **Repair as this helps you to prepare.** Repairing (acknowledging/apologising) the damage done by arguments means you will be better prepared to communicate more positively the next time you clash.
- **Try to understand your partners point of view.** What matters to them may not matter to you and visa versa. However, if you don't make the effort to appreciate each other's perspective on something you can be sure that you will stay stuck. Both of you making your points over and over again with no resolve.
- **Learn to move on.** It's easy to dwell on an issue or bring up the past but this will weaken your bond and trust. Learning

to put things to bed is about recognising what has happened and accept that the past can't be changed. Making peace and moving on where you can is very beneficial.

- **Try to be honest and vulnerable if you can.** Honest about how you feel, honest about what you would like to be different and what you need from your partner. Of course it's a bit scary being vulnerable with another person but this is how we get close to other people - by showing our real selves. Your relationship will thank you for it.
- If you are not getting on brilliantly it's easy to focus on the negative things about your partner. Once the way they eat a bag of crisps is annoying all of a sudden so is everything else they do. Instead of focussing on these little negatives, **look for the positives.** If you only look for bad, bad is all you will see.



Unhelpful things for your relationship:

- Just because you are not talking does not mean you are listening. Not properly listening to your partner is VERY unhelpful
- Not valuing your partners perspective on something because you don't share their point of view.
- Saying you are 'over it' when you clearly are not.
- Not being clear with your expectations. Expecting your partner to understand your needs...AND meet them when you haven't even shared them with your partner is an impossible task for them to complete successfully!

- Being defensive never helps a situation.
- Telling your partner what is wrong with them and what they need to do differently. What you are basically saying is, 'Be more like me because I'm better.'

Some tips for the times you need to repair when damage has been done, big or small....

Try to do some of the following:

- Show you are sorry if you have upset the other person.
- Acknowledge what you said was not nice to the other person.
- Take responsibility for anything you have done wrong rather than try to defend yourself.
- Offer an explanation....not an excuse (do not say "I'm sorry, but...")
- Show you want to try and change and do things differently next time you fall out.

So what now?

Hopefully you have read this little book and thought about your relationship. You have made a big effort to learn about how you can communicate in a different way and how to look after your relationship. Here at Amity we call this '*relationship care*'. We call it this because we know caring for our body and our mind is important. In the same way so is caring for our relationship to keep it strong and healthy.

Now its time to think about what you could do differently. Here are some suggestions:

- When we apologise for something we will not follow it up with “but”, “what” or “why”.
- Check that we are trying to see each other’s perspective on things, even when we don’t agree .
- Acknowledge what each other is thinking and feeling.
- Make sure we listen to understand each other not just listen to respond to what they say.
- Show we care, small acts of kindness so we are always building warmth and security into our partnership.
- Be clear about our expectations of one another, do we know what we each need right now and how to meet that need?
- Try not to blame and criticise each other.
- Try our best not to shout in front of the children. If they do hear us argue make sure they understand that we have made up, that everything is ok and its not their fault.

So now its your turn! Agree with your partner what 5 things you are going to do differently from now on.

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Thanks for being part of our
relationshiprevolution[™] we hope you've learnt
the skills and techniques you need to start to
move past your relationship issues, argue less
and get to a place where things feel, at the
very least, OK – for you and the kids.

Love and best wishes Kate and Emily.



ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?


Want to know more about our specialist individual
and team toolkits, programmes and sessions?

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The little book of
Relationship Care

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