



# Staying Together

## Talk, Listen, Then Compromise

All couples have arguments. The conflict may have to do with money, in-laws, sex or how to rear the children. But why are some couples able to work through these conflicts while others seem to be stuck in them or even torn apart by them? There are many answers, but one way that successful couples deal with their differences is through a combination of honest expression, clear communication and compromise.

### **Talk Openly**

In the first stages of romance, we're caught up in the euphoria of early love. We think our partner can do no wrong. Over time, however, reality sets in and each of us realizes that our views or habits are different from the other's. This may be hard to accept. But learning to talk about these differences openly, without accusation or blame, can be productive.

### **Communicate Clearly**

Practice clear communication. Instead of jumping to conclusions about what you *thought* you heard, repeat back what your partner just said to be sure you really understood it.

Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements, which sound accusatory. Focus on your feelings rather than what the other person did. No one can argue with your feelings. For example, saying "When you go to your mother's house after work instead of going straight home to be with me, I feel ignored" is more likely to open up the lines of communication than saying "You always go to your mother's after work and I don't like it."

Avoid asking "why" questions, which also sound accusatory and can put your partner on the defensive. "Why do you go to your mother's house after work?" can quickly escalate and the point of your complaint ("I feel ignored") will get lost in the process.

### **Learn to Compromise**

Once you're able to talk openly about differences, it's easier to work out compromises. Through clear communication, you'll be able to establish together what is or isn't important to you and to your partner, and then decide on compromise accordingly. In a healthy, communicative relationship, both partners are able to compromise some of the time. Compromise is productive and enhances the respect you feel for each other.