

The Best Way to Solve a Relationship Conflict

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Do this, and no one will walk away angry.



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Isn't it strange how you can offer your friend sage advice when they're fighting with their spouse, but when it comes to your own relationship struggles, you're way less rational? That might be because people who mentally distance themselves from a situation (their own or another person's) are better at thinking things through, according to new research to be published in the journal *Psychological Science*.

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Researchers recruited nearly 700 people for a three-part study. In each phase, participants were split into groups and asked to describe how they would handle certain situations (like if a partner cheated) from different perspectives. Some were asked to analyze this imaginary event as if it happened to themselves or to a friend from either the first person point of view ("why am *I* feeling this way?") or the third person angle ("why is *she/he* feeling this way?"). The goal was to see which mindset would get people to pause and really think about a problem instead of just acting irrationally.

And it turns out, people made more rational (and wiser) decisions when they thought about a problem from the third person viewpoint, whether they were analyzing a friend's situation *or* their own. Even referring to yourself as "she" instead of "I" will let you get a better perspective.

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So how can this help you during a blowout fight with your partner? Essentially, it'll give you that clarity you seem to *only* have when you're helping a friend out with her own relationship issues. "One hypothesis is that when you're able to distance yourself from a situation, you're better able to see the 'big picture,'" says lead study author Igor Grossmann, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Waterloo in Canada. Usually, emotions take control and cause a person to go with their instincts. But looking at something from an outsider's standpoint can help you really consider all of the factors and solutions about a problem, says Grossmann.

And this technique is applicable to a range of arguments and relationship troubles—from larger issues like infidelity to smaller tiffs like showing up late to date night, says Grossman. Before you duke it out, take a moment to imagine you were helping a friend through a similar problem. Consider all the information you have and the potential outcomes that could stem from your actions. Sure, it'll take longer to consider all those "what ifs," but ultimately, it will help you resolve the conflict in a wiser, more rational way.

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