

The key to a good relationship is creating bonds with one another. A relationship can be between anyone: husband/wife, father/daughter, brother/sister, employer/employee, Bishop/Relief Society President, friend/friend, etc. A bond is a positive experience shared. The more bonds shared the stronger the relationship.

When we reach out to someone, open up to them, allow them to open up to us, and listen and respond to them in a positive way, we create a bond that is based on trust, confidence, and love. Limiting these experiences, or creating a negative reaction, creates a separation that creates distrust, unfulfilled needs, and anger.

According to BYU marriage therapist, Jonathan Sandstrom, many LDS marriages are “completely disabled stable marriages”. In other words, without the rush to divorce, couples will learn to sidestep one another, living separate lives in private, yet giving the appearance of functioning properly.

What relationships need to grow and succeed is accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement with one another.

Accessibility—Time spent with one another. Being accessible is choosing one another over outside forces, including hobbies, sports, church, and other friends.

Responsiveness— Doing things together, but not engaging is not responsive time. Time, where you talk, communicate, and share feelings is essential in a marriage. Women typically love to do this; men, not so much.

Engagement—This is where sharing takes place; where needs are fulfilled for one another.

Often, one will pursue the other and the other will withdraw. The pursuer typically demands the attention needed while the withdrawer runs away to protect themselves. A cycle, or dance, can occur with every damaging argument causing deeper hurt.

Men and women have different needs. Women need to feel cherished, loved, nurtured, and cared for. Men need to feel competent, effective, and needed. If both those needs are fulfilled in one another, it is a true win/win victory.

Most marriages stay above the dotted line. Arguing usually is about issues, not needs.

-----

Couples need to get below the dotted line where deep feelings and needs are addressed.

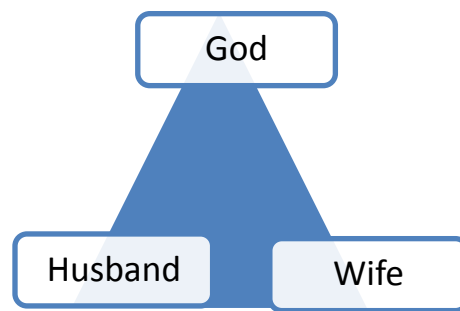
Arguments injure both parties, because real wounds occur and fester when needs are not cared for. These attachment injuries can threaten a marriage by how the injured spouse interprets the argument and how the offending spouse responds. Both can experience hurt at the same time.

These injuries can destroy trust, destabilize the relationship, destroy safety, violate commitment, and shatter dreams. Injuries from abuse come in many forms: verbal, emotional, sexual, physical, as well as in withdrawal, and endless punishing.

Both the husband, and the wife, needs to be very careful and respectful when working below the line. There are usually two different stories going on when injuries occur and both stories need to be heard and respected.

It is not a bad thing to argue; people see things differently. What matters is how you resolve the disagreement; the respect, trust, and care taken.

LDS marriages carry spiritual implications. Arguments can lead toward acts that violate the covenant commitment and steal the spirit away. The loss of church privileges and spiritual death separates us from God; a double violation of the Divine Triangle: Separation from spouse AND God.



Everyone needs to connect. A sexual connection is not the only way to connect. In fact, it is the last place people should connect. When it reaches that level of connection, the relationship should be solid, full of trust, and sacred.

In order to prevent injuries conduct routine maintenance. Be accessible to one another, respond well toward one another. Do not take one another for granted, but continuously communicate “below the dotted line”. Get the slivers out FAST. Arguments will happen, but don’t let them cause extended injury. Keep communication always open. Let go of defense mechanisms as well as the pursuer/withdrawer dance. Avoid drifting apart.

If healing needs to be done it is necessary for both sides to take responsibility and accountability for actions.

- The truth shall make you free, even though it hurts a lot.
- Avoid self-betrayal, blame, rationalization
- Think about and talk through hard things
- Claim and use your agency to own choices
- Learn to hold your partner’s pain without being defensive or retaliating.
- Accept and own the pain you have caused your family.

It takes a long time for the betrayer to apologize without excuse. Saying "I'm sorry, but..." is not an apology. Putting any blame on anything else, especially the injured party, is not an apology. When apologizing, the words "I'm Sorry" are not good enough. Yes, recognition without excuse is essential. But some form of action must accompany those words.

Restitution is the act of restoring what is broken, or undoing the hurt. Part of rebuilding trust is continual restitution. It takes a long time with many many deposits in the emotional bank.

Heavenly Father knew what He was doing when he created men and women. They are polar opposites in many ways. The reason is so each can overcome the weaknesses of the species. A man and woman on a teeter-totter should strive to balance it, coming closer to the center, both equally watching their own placement to help the other. Instead, what often happens, one or the other jumps off making the other bump hard on the ground.

Regeneration, of a marriage, or any relationship, can end up stronger than it ever was, even with the painful wounds once exposed. It takes two partners to make it work.

Forgiveness is the hardest mountain to climb after a difficult relationship. Hope and Healing are divine gifts and should be asked for and sought after. Seek grace to do what we cannot do. Extending forgiveness is a gift you give your partner, but more especially it is a gift you give yourself; the peace that comes of letting go. Forgiveness cleans house, it purifies you, and helps you to see the world differently. God will be with you every step of the way.

When both partners are healed, changed, and ready to start again you can be like the 6 million dollar man and the Bionic Woman: Better than before.

To maintain a Working Marriage:

- Discuss the problems above the dotted line often.
- Move to below the dotted line to share feelings of why it is important to you and seek to understand
- Let communication drive your marriage
- Seek to fulfill the needs in each other

F. Burton Howard said,

"If you want something to last forever, you treat it differently. You shield it and protect it. You never abuse it. You don't expose it to the elements. You don't make it common or ordinary. If it ever becomes tarnished, you lovingly polish it until it gleams like new. It becomes special because you have made it so, and it grows more beautiful and precious as time goes by."

Resources:

"Eternal Marriage", F. Burton Howard, Ensign, May 2003.

"In the Strength of the Lord", Elder Bednar, Jan 8, 2002, BYU-I Devotional

“Watch Your Step”, Elder Holland, Mormon Message

“Bonds That Make Us Free”, C. Terry Warner, Shadow Mountain Publisher

“Learning the Healer’s Art”, Elaine S. Marshall, 2002, BYU Speeches

“Couples”, Dr. Carlfred Broderick, Simon & Schuster Publisher

“Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love”, Susan M. Johnson, Little, Brown and Company Publisher