



# The Lexington Group, Inc.

## Your Employee Assistance Program

## What Makes a Partnership Work?

Periods of conflict, frustration or anger are an inevitable part of every marriage or long-term partnership simply because they are in the fabric of all human relationships. Why are some couples able to work through their disagreements and thrive- while others end up in a vicious cycle of negative feelings, emotional distancing, and deterioration that leads to separation?

Contrary to popular belief, how much you love each other is not the best way to determine the future of your relationship. Rather, how you handle conflicts and disagreements. Repeated criticizing, accusations, inflexibility, and withdrawal are predictive of relationship rifts. Over time, these negative patterns of dealing with conflict erode good aspects in a relationship, ultimately leading to a relationship overwhelmed by negative feelings.

### How To Constructively Resolve Conflict

By learning to manage disagreements constructively, you can limit negative encounters with your partner and strengthen your understanding of your partner. Follow these guidelines below to prevent unproductive conflicts:

#### 1. Eliminate Patterns of Negative Communication

Are you and your partner guilty of any of these communication styles below?

- Criticizing your partner's opinions, feelings, or desires
- Dismissing the thoughts, feelings, or worth of your partner
- Name-calling and insensitivity
- Bringing up past hurts
- Making accusations
- Turning a blind eye to their concerns
- Avoiding disagreements or important discussions
- Withdrawing from conflict

These negative ways of interacting sabotage any attempt at constructive communication. Eliminate these problematic patterns of communication as they are devastating to a relationship and unfair to your partner.

#### 2. How to Listen

Constructive and positive communication begins with genuinely attempting to understand the other person's point of view, needs or feelings. "Listening to understand" focuses attention on the issue at hand, not individual personalities. For more effective listening you should:

- **Thoughtfully Listen** - Give your partner an opportunity to communicate their thoughts, feelings, needs or desires regarding the issue at hand. Listen for understanding and appreciate their words, rather than spending time preparing for what you are going to say next.
- **Ask Questions** - Guard against assuming that you know what your partner meant or felt by asking questions to assure your understanding. Ask gentle questions such as "Is this what you're saying?"
- **Summarize** - When your partner is finished speaking, repeat what they said *in your own words*. It's important to confirm with your partner that you understand and it lets them know their words matter to you.

#### 3. Improve Your Speaking Skills

By learning to speak without attacking your partner's thoughts, feelings, actions or worth you can keep these disagreements from escalating into a full-blown argument. To improve your talking skills, you should:

- **Make "I" Statements** - Avoid starting a sentence with "you". It sounds like an accusation. Instead, share how it is for you. Say, "I think..." or "I want..." or "I feel..."
- **Use "Feeling" Words** - Communicate clearly with your partner by using feeling words like "sad", "happy", "angry", "worried" etc. Remember to start the sentence with "I" as in "I felt hurt when..."
- **Focus On Issues Not Personalities** - Deal with specific topics that action and compromise can be worked out. Be specific when you introduced a complaint. Confine yourself to one issue at a time.

## How The Lexington Group Can Help

The Lexington Group can help set up confidential Online or Face-to-Face Counseling.

Request service and find out additional information at: [The-Lexington-Group.com](http://The-Lexington-Group.com)

For 24/7 support call:

UNITED STATES & ENGLAND  
1-800-676-4357

CANADA  
1-800-567-4343

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1-855-328-1185

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