

Regaining Friendly Relations

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When a child is born parents experience joys and challenges. It's an enormous responsibility to take good care of children, and a person's stress level is bound to rise. Most people report increased tension in their marriage or between parenting partners.

Even though good parents may yell at each other when their children are around, research shows that children are frightened by this and often think that *they* are bad and have done something wrong. It's important to work towards reducing a child's exposure to parental arguments.

Here's an example of a typical situation that can lead to an argument and negative communication:

You've just picked the kids up from childcare, you come home to a house that needs cleaning, a dinner that needs making, and children who need your attention. Your partner comes home and says, *"I sure had a hard day at work, I'm hungry, why isn't dinner ready yet?"*

How you respond will depend on many things like your mood, how you were raised, if you're already angry with your partner, and how you feel about arguing in front of the kids.

One person might get angry and yell from the other room, *"Can't you see I'm busy, you're only interested in yourself, so go make your own dinner."* While a different parent might say, *"Hey honey, I'm in the bedroom. Come give us a kiss, then we can heat up the leftovers from last night. Sorry to hear you had a hard day."*

How would you respond? Check out these communication tips:

- Recognize when you're angry. When you're angry, you're not at your most reasonable. *"I can't talk right now. I'll come back in a few minutes."*
- When you notice your stress rising, take a few deep breaths and go to your room to cool off. Ask yourself what you're feeling. Is it disappointment, hurt, frustration, or sadness?
- When you come home, give your partner a kiss or hug before you start to complain. Remember that you're friends, and both work hard.
- Plan time to nurture your relationship. Time passes, and you can drift apart. Try for a weekly date, or time together after the kids are asleep.
- Give positive feedback. Be specific about the things you appreciate. *"The soup you made was great, thanks so much."* Or, *"I sure like it when you read stories to the kids. Some down time really helps me."*
- Take care of yourself. If your partner is losing control, you can leave or call for help.
- Seek support if you can't seem to regain friendly relations. Reach out to a therapist, a minister, friends, or relatives.

