

MARRIAGE IN MOTION

Transcript: Module 2, Lesson 2

LAURA

Welcome back to Module Two where we're focusing on managing conflict.

We want to reiterate, every single couple has conflict. Some couples fight a lot. They're like firecrackers. They pop loud and hot, but cool off just as fast. Other couples have a higher tolerance for discomfort and are able to avoid most conflict situations simply by letting things slide. Other couples are really really good at conflict. They engage it, work through it, actively work together to compromise.

Couples who are really healthy, no matter where they fall on the spectrum of conflict, they have strategies for mitigating the power and pain of that conflict. I want to introduce you to some of those strategies today.

But as always: Let me start with a question:

What did your family teach you about conflict?

Take a few seconds and write down a few sentences. We'll come back to them later.

ZACH

Hey, Laura...what was your family like?

LAURA

I have two answers for you. Conflict between my parents was very difficult for me, especially following their divorce. I think every parents goal is to make a divorce the least traumatic as possible for their children. My parents had lots of conflict but also desired the least amount of communication with one another as possible. This resulted in constant tension simmering beneath the surface of their co-parenting relationship and very little resolution.

ZACH

What are you and Ryan like?

LAURA

We have learned to manage conflict effectively over time. When we first met, I was a master stonewaller. I could remember feeling so in control while stonewalling, almost as if I was holding him hostage until I responded. This didn't last long though. Overtime, I learned to communicate frustrations early, not allowing them to build up and stew (like I learned as a child). We rarely have conflict much anymore but when we do, we are pretty darn good at apologizing and taking ownership for our piece of the puzzle. Again, we don't deserve an award..if anything, it is my husband who helped to shape

me these last ten years. I entered this relationship with some bad habits and overtime we have developed our own blueprint for how WE do conflict well.

ZACH

Of those couples you listed, Rebecca and I are a lot like the first kind. The firecrackers. We snipe at each other quite a bit. We are both prone to raise our voices. But we're also really good at making up and coming back together.

In therapy world, this is called "repair". This lesson is about three ways to prioritize repair as a way to mitigate the power and pain of conflict. In this video you'll learn...

1. What qualifies as repair.
2. How to repair "before" conflict begins..
3. How to repair "during" conflict.
4. How to repair "after" conflict has run its course.
5. The two most important responses to repair.
6. To become clear about your "next step".

Remember my snow skiing analogy from Module One? The goal in a relationship, and especially in conflict, is to stay paired. This requires that you're making small adjustments constantly. But I want to be specific about when and how to repair during conflict. The focus for today is...

Repair is about managing conflict "before", "during" and "after".

LAURA

Let's review what qualifies as repair: According to Dr. Gottman repair as "any statement or action - silly or otherwise - that prevents negativity from escalating out of control."

That's a pretty big bucket. It can include anything... provided it brings negativity down. The best repairs have humor and whimsy.. .humor is a huge part of staying connected. Monty Python great John Cleese said it best, "A wonderful thing about true laughter is that it just destroys any kind of system of dividing people."

When we were preparing this lesson, I was reminded of a story from some of my closest friends. We were on a road-trip, they were bickering and escalating until they finally stopped speaking to each other. The wife, who was sitting in the passenger seat leaned across the center console and licked her husband's face from chin to temple. That was all it took. In that moment, they had re-paired.

I'm just saying...the possibilities are endless. There are, however, three specific times you need to prioritize repair.

They are "before", "during" and "after" conflict.

ZACH

One of the great secrets of conflict management is that you can mitigate most of it by simply getting ahead of it. Take 20 seconds to look around your room right now. Look for all the red things in your field of view. If it's red, or rouge, or rose, or scarlet...note it.

Now close your eyes: Mentally recall all of the green things in your room. I bet your list was pretty small.

This is what preemptive repair is all about. You will see what you are looking for. So, look for the qualities that will keep you from having and fueling negative thoughts. Look for the green things. If you expect your partner to fail you, she will. But if you're looking for what is good in her -- it'll mitigate the pain and power of your conflict.

Still, inevitably, you're going to get into it. And inevitably, your conflict will escalate. So how do you get out - assuming you don't want to lick each other's faces.

This is tougher. Usually because you're fired up and not thinking clearly. Everything in your body is telling you to preserve your safety and your dignity. This is where you say things you don't mean. You cross the line. Inertia takes over and you need an eject button.

I had one couple in my practice who mastered this moment perfectly (Zach tells a story...).

You may not need anything so elaborate. Remember any statement or action will do, but I think it's important that you decide on the phrase together that you agree to honor it as essential to your repair process.

This context makes perfect sense within the context of: Teach about S\$M sex. It's no different in conflict...in fact it's probably more important. Once you've halted the process and completely de-escalated, you can focus on post conflict repair.

LAURA

Repair after conflict is actually pretty simple:

Apologize. Both of you. Apologize.

I think we have a really skewed idea of what an apology is, but it's really just this:

1. Acknowledge that you did something that affected another person. "Yes, what I did, had an impact on you."
2. Express some empathy. "I can appreciate that made you feel sad, angry, gross. I'd probably feel the same thing if that happened to me."
3. Demonstrate some commitment to change. "Oh man, I don't want you to ever feel like that again. I'll be more aware of that next time."

ZACH

But here's the thing:

Once you're in receipt of an apology, you have one of two responsibilities: Accept it. Or ask for what else you need.

This leads to our last lesson: The two most important responses to repair.

First you need to recognize it. This goes back to the "looking for green" state of mind. You need to look for repair attempts by your partner. ESPECIALLY if they're not explicit. Be looking for ALL of the ways that you can stay connected before and during and after conflict. Train your eyes and your mind to see all of the good that is going on between you. When your spouse is trying to repair with you, recognize and acknowledge it.

Second, you need to reward it. In Module One, we talked about how important it is to let repair work. The persistent failure of repair attempts is a predictor of divorce. So, say thank you. Set your own agenda down, if only for a second. Hug back.

Imagine how much courage it takes to repair. Don't let that go unrewarded. Ignoring your partner's repair attempts will only discourage future attempts. And that erodes the entire foundation of the relationship.

LAURA

Remember at the top of the video when I asked you about your family? I didn't forget. The reason I asked is that when I'm meeting with a couple in my office, I cannot tell you how many times she has said, "my family did conflict like this" and then he has said, "my family did conflict like that".

I always say the same thing..."You are your family...when your kid is sitting on my couch 30 years from now, what do you want them to say about how their family manages conflict? You have control of that right now."

Take some time to think about what you want your kids to say 30 years from now about the way you managed conflict. Will they say that their family was really good at repair? What will they say about your before, during, and after strategies?

As for next steps, we want you to have a conversation with one another about repair. The activity sheet titled "Repair" has some discussion starters about repair before, during and after.

Once you make some discoveries, record your strategies on the activity sheet. This will serve as a reminder of the agreement that you have made about repairing conversations.

Repairs are a game changer for many couples. It is a strategy that they can use immediately and often to keep conversations moving in the right direction. Using a repair is another small win for the relationship. So, congrats. We will see you in the next video!