

The Relationship Offenses

Disagreement-Related Offenses

(More comprehensive descriptions can be found on pages 2-3)

- Concluding that one's partner is wrong when s/he isn't
- Defensiveness
- Dismissiveness
- Calling one's partner names or putting one's partner down
- Unwillingness to compromise
- Acting "high and mighty"
- Shutting down, walking away or refusing to talk, in spite of one's partner's flexible and open-minded attitude
- Excusing oneself from the responsibility of standing up for oneself and instead blaming one's partner for being controlling

It's wrong for people to act in these ways during disagreements, but if they have done so over time, chances are very high that their partners have done just as many of these things. Attempts of one partner to point out the other's faults will likely fail unless he or she is also making just as big a deal of his or her own faults. People who are successful in getting their partners to commit fewer of these offenses do it by reducing the frequency of their own offenses.

Obvious Offenses

When people ...

- are physically aggressive
- intentionally lie or deceive their partners
- are sexually unfaithful
- fail to keep clear-cut agreements without good reason
- badmouth or undermine their partners
- violate their partners' privacy or personal space
- make irreversible, unilateral decisions regarding things about which they know their partners have strong feelings.

These actions are clearly wrong, and the "meet in the middle" rule doesn't apply. Effective people ask their partners to stop, and if their partners don't, they refuse to continue business as usual until their partners do. However, the odds that their partners will indeed stop and feel remorse are directly related to the attitude people have as they refuse to continue business as usual. People who are effective at "getting through" to their partners draw lines when they need to, but in their heads, they avoid making a big deal of how awful their partners are for doing things that require them to draw the line.

The Offense of Misplaced Overall Blame

When people consistently distort the degree of their own misbehavior relative to the degree and amount of their partners' to the point where they believe that...

- their partners are mostly to blame for their relationship problems
- overall, they have better relationship habits than their partners do.

This offense is more serious than most people realize, and is the single most potent predictor of relationship dissolution found to date. If people continue to believe that their partners are the main villains, when in reality their own contributions have been just as destructive as their partners', their relationships usually end. When they are globally blamed by their partners, skillful people acknowledge that there is a degree of truth in their partners' claims that they have behaved badly at times. Then, they calmly state their beliefs that their partners have behaved just as badly as they have. They are prepared to give specific examples of their partners' destructive actions, while continuing to acknowledge the destructiveness of their own.

Non-Offenses (Often mistakenly believed to be offenses)

When people mistakenly believe their partners are...

- selfish
- irresponsible
- inattentive
- insensitive
- immature
- misguided
- unrealistic
- irrational
- short-sighted
- biased
- lazy
- inconsiderate
- self-absorbed
- unrealistic
- unfeeling or uncaring
- needy
- controlling
- mean
- negative
- over-reactive

Studies indicate that, most often when people believe that their partners' conduct fits these descriptors, there isn't anything wrong with their partners' priorities, preferences or opinions. Because your priorities at the moment seem so obvious and logical to you, it's easy to assume that your partner's priorities are out of line, if they don't match up. If you make this mistake regularly, you'll dramatically lower the odds that you'll receive the kind of love and respect from your partner that you'd like to have.