

# Chart 3: When Your Partner's Thinking or Actions are Wrong

## During a Disagreement

When the way she treats you during a disagreement is wrong

### The guidelines on this page don't apply.

Follow guidelines in Charts #1 and #2

## Other than During a Disagreement

When she does something wrong, and that's what triggers a disagreement in the first place

- Remember that researchers have discovered that the majority of the time, when people feel like their partners have done something wrong, they really haven't... they're just at cross purposes. Neither partner's priorities or actions are wrong.
- Remind yourself that if you imply she's wrong when she really isn't, you're doing one of the most damaging things that people do in relationships. [2]
- Ask yourself...
  - "Is it possible that there are other sane, healthy people who might not be upset with her if they were in my shoes?"
  - "Would my partner be as upset with me as I am with her if the roles were reversed?" [2]
- Ask yourself, "Am I upset because she's been dishonest, sexually disloyal, physically aggressive, she's failed to keep an agreement, badmouthed or undermined me?: If not, it's likely that you're misclassifying her actions as "wrong" when they really aren't, and this is a mistake that will dramatically lower the odds that she'll be able to care about your feelings and be willing to make some changes.
- Remember that letting go of the idea that she's wrong...
- doesn't mean that you shouldn't be upset. (It's natural to feel upset when you and your partner are at cross purposes.)
- doesn't mean you need to just shut up and let her do whatever she wants. (There's nothing wrong with your wants or needs either, and your feelings need to count as much as hers.)
- doesn't mean that you don't have the right to ask her to make some changes (it just means that the reason why she needs to be willing to change isn't because she's wrong but rather because your priorities or expectations are just as legitimate as hers, and when you two disagree, she needs to be willing to meet you in the middle.) [6]

You still feel that her thinking or actions are wrong

You realize that maybe she hasn't done anything wrong, but it still really bothers you and you want her to change

The remaining guidelines on this page don't apply.  
See the guidelines in Chart #2

- Relax. Take your time. Assume that she will understand that what she did was wrong if you can avoid implying that she's an awful person for doing it. [2]
- Remember that if inside you're feeling disgusted, outraged or indignant about what she did, or in your mind you're making a big deal about how awful she was for doing it, chances are very slim that you'll get her to really care about your feelings and regret what she did.
- If you're feeling disgusted, outraged or indignant, try saying to yourself ...
  - "I need to make it clear that this is wrong and it's not gonna fly with me, but... it's not like I necessarily have any room to talk... I've done plenty of dysfunctional things too. I'm not really in a position to act all high and mighty. That doesn't mean I'm gonna just let this slide, it just means I don't have to get all indignant or act like she's a horrible person."
- Now that you've adjusted your attitude, explain why what she did seems wrong to you, and ask if she can see why you feel this way.
- She'll probably begin offering an explanation for why she acted as she did that will seem to you like she's rationalizing or justifying her actions. Resist the urge to disqualify what she's saying. Rather than disputing details, acknowledge anything that makes her actions even a little bit more understandable. Then let her know that although her behavior is more understandable, you still feel it's wrong and don't want it to happen again. [3]

She's defensive, dismissive, unapologetic, or tries to change the subject

She understands why you're upset, acknowledges she shouldn't have done it, or says she'll do things differently from now on.

- Read the section called "Taking a Firm Stand," page 60-62, in the book, *Developing Habits for Relationship Success*
- Consult a therapist regarding how to best begin taking a firm stand.

The problem is that she's apologized before, and now she's done the same type of thing again!

This is the first time she's done the thing you're upset about or acknowledged that she shouldn't have done it.

Tell her that in order to feel confident it won't happen again, you need to know she's sincere, and has a viable plan for change. Ask her to explain it to you.

She's upset that you won't just take her word for it, and accuses you of being unwilling to accept an apology

She assures you that she's sincere and explains her plan for change non-defensively.

Accept her acknowledgment and move on