

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

During a Disagreement

When the way he 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 he 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 he's wrong when he 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 him if they were in my shoes?"
 - "Would my partner be as upset with me as I am with him if the roles were reversed?" [2]
- Ask yourself, "Am I upset because he's been dishonest, sexually disloyal, physically aggressive, he's failed to keep an agreement, badmouthed or undermined me?: If not, it's likely that you're misclassifying his actions as "wrong" when they really aren't, and this is a mistake that will dramatically lower the odds that he'll be able to care about your feelings and be willing to make some changes.
- Remember that letting go of the idea that he'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 him do whatever he wants. (There's nothing wrong with your wants or needs either, and your feelings need to count as much as his.)
- doesn't mean that you don't have the right to ask him to make some changes (it just means that the reason why he needs to be willing to change isn't because he's wrong but rather because your priorities or expectations are just as legitimate as his, and when you two disagree, he needs to be willing to meet you in the middle.) [6]

You still feel that his thinking or actions are wrong

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

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

- Relax. Take your time. Assume that he will understand that what he did was wrong if you can avoid implying that he's an awful person for doing it. [2]
- Remember that if inside you're feeling disgusted, outraged or indignant about what he did ,or in your mind you're making a big deal about how awful he was for doing it, chances are very slim that you'll get him to really care about your feelings and regret what he 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 he's a horrible person."
- Now that you've adjusted your attitude, explain to him why what he did seems wrong to you, and ask if he can see why you feel this way.
- He'll probably begin offering an explanation for why he acted as he did that will seem to you like he's rationalizing or justifying his actions. Resist the urge to disqualify what he's saying. Rather than disputing details, acknowledge anything that makes his actions even a little bit more understandable. Then let him know that although his behavior is more understandable, you still feel it's wrong and don't want it to happen again. [3]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He assures you that he's sincere and explains his plan for change non-defensively.

Accept his acknowledgment and move on