How Do Your Conflicts Affect Your Self-Image?

Objective

To recognize how your self-image is negatively impacted by relationship conflicts.

You Should Know

Ideally, relationships bring out the best in each partner, offering nourishment and support, contributing to each person. When couples feel positively about themselves or have high esteem, romantic satisfaction may be less elusive. When you and your partner's self-images are positive, your sex life may improve, conflict is easier to resolve, and you experience presence, vulnerability, and a sense of closeness.

Relationships can also negatively affect self-image and result in negative self-statements and painful emotions. This can be a damaging cycle because people with low self-esteem have been found to be more likely to remain in unhealthy relationships. Not only do they stay in the relationship, but they don't confront the things within their relationships that are upsetting.

Recent research indicates that partners with diminished self-esteem tend to avoid confronting problems or conflicts. That avoidance may reflect feelings of insecurity, leading to withdrawal from conflicts that might be resolved through more open, transparent communication. Conflicts in a relationship are inevitable, but if conflicts repeatedly trigger negative emotions and self-statements it's time to determine how you can break this cycle.

Identifying Negative Self- Statements and Emotions

Directions: Think about the last time you had an argument and circle the self-statements that you had after the argument. Then go back and look at the negative emotions that were triggered.

Emotions	Self-Statement
Inadequate	I'm simply not good enough. I'm basically incompetent.
Defective	I'm the problem because something is wrong with me.
Powerless	I'm the victim here; I can't do anything to change this. I am controlled.
Failure	I'm just not a great partner. I don't live up to expectations. I fall short.
Inferior	I'm not important, and it seems everyone else is better than me.
Unloved	My partner doesn't love me. There's no romance between us.
Rejected	My partner doesn't want me or need me. The desire is gone.
Abandoned	I will eventually be alone; my partner will leave me. No commitment.
Disconnected	We are emotionally detached, separated, disconnected.
Cheated	My partner withholds affection / attention. I don't get what I want.
Dissatisfied	I am unhappy in this relationship. I feel no joy.
Worthless	I am useless and offer no value to my partner.
Unaccepted	My partner doesn't accept me for who I am.
Judged	I am constantly judged, and my partner has negative opinions of me.
Ignored	I receive no attention from my partner. I feel neglected.
Unimportant	I am irrelevant and of low priority to my partner.
Humiliated	This relationship is destructive and I have no dignity or self-respect.

List other self-statements you have had after a conflict with a partner and the emotions they triggered.

Emotions   **Self-Statements**

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Think About It

Looking back at your responses, do you see any patterns in your self-evaluations or negative self-statements?

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How are your negative evaluations of yourself impacting your self-image as well as your behavior?

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What can you do to address the negative self-evaluations and self-statements outside of your relationship?

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How helpful was this exercise? _____
(**1** = not very helpful, **5** = moderately helpful, **10** = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in effectively identifying your negative self-statements and consequent emotions?

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