

Disagreements In Marriage



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With Your Host

Natalie Bacon

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Disagreements In Marriage

Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life Podcast* where it's all about designing your life on your terms and now your host, Natalie Bacon.

Hey there. Welcome to the podcast. I hope you're doing well. I am so happy to be here with you. This morning I was so tired. I had been up with Benji, our pup, in the middle of the night. I gave myself permission to take a much slower morning, and it was so worth it to get a little bit more grounded. Really allow my emotions and to not kind of push myself in a way that really felt disconnected from my body. Balancing that with, of course I'm still going to show up and be here with you. I wouldn't miss it. And record this podcast.

That's sort of how I approach kind of this balance between rest and producing, particularly on a daily basis as I get further along in this pregnancy and reassess what I have the capacity for. Also wanting to show up still. It's everchanging. It's kind of been a really fun interesting coaching experience for myself to do this work as I'm growing and changing so quickly. So that's what's going on over here.

I want to talk about Grow You. The doors are open today. You're going to get the Mind Your Money class, which I talked with you about money last week. Then today I want to talk with you about disagreements in marriage. Because when you sign up for Grow You, when the doors are open within this next week, you are going to not only have access to the October content. You will also on the first of November get immediate access to the November content. The November content is going to be relationships on purpose.

So we're transitioning talking about money this month in October to November we're going to go and deep dive into relationships. So I always like to teach a new course and do new coaching and new workbooks every single month in there. So if you want to join us, the doors are open for one week starting today. You can head on over to nataliebacon.com/coaching.

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In today's episode I'm going to talk with you about disagreeing in marriage. I was looking back at the episodes that I've done for you before, and I found the episode disagreeing with family. So after you listen to this episode, go back and listen to the one about disagreeing with family. There are some underlying similarities, but I'm teaching it a little bit differently in this episode specifically with respect to marriage.

So I want to give you five steps to disagreeing peacefully in marriage. So wherever you're at in your marital journey, you're going to find disagreements. It might be bigger disagreements that happen seasonally, or it might be kind of the smaller day to day dance that we do with our spouses that end up in little tiffs. Steve and I are no exception. So I'm not only speaking from my own experience, but this is definitely one of the main topics that I coach most on inside Grow You.

To protect the marriage that I have, I'm going to give you the most common examples that I coach on. That way Steve doesn't have a bigger disagreement after this. Truthfully, I am so grateful for our marriage and the work that we put in in a really mindful way that enables us to move through disagreements pretty peacefully I would say. We're not the couple who is always fighting. I have been in those relationships in the past. I don't know if you have or not, but it's kind of like that from almost the beginning.

What I've found in marriage is it's much steadier. What you can do, even with the steadiness, is have kind of a framework to disagree in a way that's really healthy. So that it's not so up and down and catastrophic when typically the issue that you're disagreeing about isn't even something you want to be seen as that big of a deal, right.

If it's where you want to send your kids to school or where you want to move next or something like that. If you take a really big picture view, you don't want this to have a negative impact on your marriage. Yet it can be something that in the moment feels like it is having this really big impact. So here's the five step framework to disagree peacefully in marriage. I want

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to go through the five steps, and then I want to talk about the most common examples that I coach on.

So step number one is to allow your spouse to feel how he wants to feel without trying to fix it. This is so hard. I find this with our spouses, our children, our immediate families. Whenever someone is feeling a negative emotion, we go into fixit mode. I'm saying we here because I do this myself too. I even do it with Penny and Benji. I don't want them to feel any discomfort. So I want to fix their emotions.

If you just do this step alone and allow your spouse to feel how they want to feel, you will create so much more space and peace inside your marriage. Because when you want to fix the other person's feeling, it puts you in this space of trying to control what they're thinking. Because your thinking always creates how you're feeling.

So if husband comes home from work and he is kind of frustrated about something going on at work and you start trying to change his frustration, maybe you're trying to change the circumstance. Like let's work out. Let's go out to eat. Let's go do something and fix how you're feeling. You're not allowing space for him to just be and feel, okay. So step number one is allow your spouse to feel what he wants to feel without trying to fix it.

Step number two is to check in with how you're feeling. It can be really tempting to want to mirror your spouse and take on his feelings. I consistently have to check myself with this because Steve is such a naturally happy, peaceful, joyful person. So if ever he is a little bit frustrated or down, it's unusual. My natural brain's default is to want to mirror him. So if he's feeling down then I want to feel down too or I want to fix it.

Step number two is about kind of taking that emotional responsibility back where you check in with how you're feeling so you see that it's completely separate, and you have control over how you want to feel. You might not want to feel super excited that spouse is frustrated. What you can do is you don't have to add more frustration to the frustration that spouse is feeling.

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So if Steve is feeling frustrated, I might want to feel compassionate or I might want to feel curious.

That's actually step number three is to listen, but listen from a place of curiosity and compassion. So if you are in a place of wanting to fix your spouse's emotions, you might find yourself immediately going into mirroring his emotions where he is also feeling frustrated. So then you feel frustrated, and you're trying to fix the frustration. If you take a step back, check in with how you're feeling, and decide—so make a conscious decision—that you want to listen to your spouse from a place of curiosity and compassion.

So this goes to kind of owning that we all have thoughts and ideas and opinions that create our emotions. That my thoughts, ideas, and opinions are not better than spouse's thoughts, ideas, and opinions. So this goes to step four, which is let go of needing to be right.

A tool that really helps my clients with this is living in the “and” and letting go of thinking that there's this one right way and one wrong way. So if you are disagreeing about how to parent and you want to parent one way, spouse wants to parent another way, and you're disagreeing about that. Kind of seeing that spouse has ideas and opinions and thoughts and they're different from yours, and that that's okay. You can allow those differences. You can find space for there to be two ways of doing it. You're both right in some ways, and you're both wrong in some ways.

When we hold onto this idea of one of us has to win the disagreement and one of us has to lose it, the marriage loses. So instead we want to live in this sort of gray space, living in the “and”, where we're not coming from this place of righteousness where we have to be right. This is a skill you can practice. I've practiced it a lot, and I continue to practice it. I know it's also something that so many of our Grow You members practice as well. It takes that intentionality and checking in with yourself and kind of that mindfulness about what you're thinking and what you are feeling.

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The final step, step number five, is to be committed to allowing for disagreements while still being on the same team. So a lot of times our default thinking is that we, in a marriage, need to agree about everything. That if we disagree, something's gone wrong and we need to fix it. Instead what if we just changed that rule and said, "Oh, of course. Because we're different humans, we have different brains. We're supposed to have different opinions. This means that sometimes we're going to disagree, but we're still on the same team."

So now I want to go through a couple examples. Again, the biggest examples that I coach on the most are responsibilities around the house. So chores, splitting up kind of who's doing what, parenting, how to parent in particular ways. Buying a new house comes up a lot. Spouse wants to move to one type of house, and client wants to move to another. Then disagreement with in-laws.

So I'm going to start there. Let's say that you are disagreeing about your in-laws about your son's birthday, and you want your spouse to sort of get involved and be on your side. It becomes this push/pull between you and in-laws, and then you bring your spouse into it because you want him to also agree with you and take your side more or less.

So if you use this five step process, how it would play out would be step number one, you would allow your spouse to feel how he wants to feel. So in this case, spouse might be feeling a little bit different, and you might be feeling frustrated or angry or disappointed or some sort of negative emotion. Let's say spouse feels indifferent. Like it's his parents and he wants to be a little bit more neutral about it. Not trying to change his feelings is really important.

So spouse gets to feel how he wants to feel, and then you want to check in with how you're feeling. So if you're feeling anger, that's okay. We can allow the anger. We don't need spouse to change who he's being, how he's feeling, what he's thinking. We can own the fact that we're feeling this negative emotion, and that's okay.

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Then what we want to do is we want to listen to what spouse has to say without trying to convince spouse. So maybe he says something like, “Yeah, I don’t really care how we do our son’s birthday. It’s totally fine with me if we do it either way. The way you want to do it or the way my parents want to do it.”

Instead of listening to kind of respond and convince him that your way is the right way, which as a lawyer, my brain always wants to go to that place. I’m much better at it now. It’s pausing and deciding to listen with curiosity and compassion. It doesn’t mean that you have to change your opinion, but you can maintain that connection from this place of curiosity and compassion.

It might sound something like the inner chatter that you have is, “I wonder why he’s thinking this. I wonder what about his experience is creating these thoughts? I wonder if there is something that I am missing? I wonder how he’s a little bit right and I’m a little bit wrong and vice versa.” Kind of going to this openness where you’re just willing to be wrong. It doesn’t mean that you have to change your opinion, but it means that you maintain respect for your spouse. When you approach a disagreement from a place of “you’re right no matter what”, it increases the separation and the tension, and no one wins.

So when you listen to your husband or your spouse or your partner from this place of curiosity and compassion, you’ll really find that it’s natural to go into step four, which is letting go of the need to be right. Seeing that there are so many different ways that you could have son’s birthday. It’s okay to want it to be one way. It’s also okay that in-laws want it to be another way. It’s okay that husband is a little bit indifferent about it.

What often is underneath sometimes that little bit of anger is some disappointment. Moving from anger up the emotional scale up to something like disappointment actually feels a lot more grounded and better than anger. So if you can find the emotion underneath that anger, like disappointment, and settle there you can then work through that emotion

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and allow it without trying to fix it or change it or change your circumstances in order to feel better.

So approaching it from this place of we both might be right, and we both might be wrong. And allowing space for spouse to totally disagree with you or be indifferent about son's birthday, but still seeing that you're on the same team and you love son, and you are going to love him on his birthday no matter if you have a birthday party or you don't or something in between.

Now let's take the example of housework or chores, responsibilities. I find that most of the popular teachings out there will try to show you how you can make the household responsibilities more evenly split so that they're fair. It's just an idea that's made up, and I don't think that idea is useful at all. In fact, I think when you have the belief that housework and chores and responsibilities are supposed to be split kind of evenly and fairly, you're just inviting yourself to a disagreement. Because what is fair?

Most likely you will want things a certain way and your spouse wants things a different way. So what's common for me to coach on is someone will be generally more clean than the other spouse. Then that person who's cleaner wants the house cleaner and more tidy and more organized than the other spouse doesn't care as much.

When this is the case and you are the spouse who wants it to be cleaner and more organized, and you are getting into disagreements with spouse. A lot of times it's not that the spouse won't help. It's that we want our spouses to read our minds, and we don't want to ask for the help. Because when we do ask, spouse helps more often than not. At least in most of the coaching that I've done. Sometimes spouse doesn't want to help, but more often than not spouse will help. We just don't even like that we have to ask.

What I really want to encourage you to do here is to allow your spouse, like give him permission to have his own opinions about how clean the house should be, how organized it should be. How much he should contribute.

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Like really see that there isn't a right way. I know this is hard because we think that our way is the right way.

If I could teach you how to control husband and tell you to do exactly what you want how you want it, I would teach that. It's sort of a running joke in Grow You because we all want that. We all want our spouses to know what to do without even asking, and we want them to like to do it in the way that we want it done. So we want our spouses to basically be us when it comes to household responsibilities.

When we notice this and say it in this way, it's kind of funny. Like of course they're different. Of course everyone has different preferences and different opinions and different ideas of chores and responsibilities and organization and all of it. Allowing space for differing opinions and differing feelings about all of it is going to create so much more peace in your marriage.

Then check in with how you're feeling about it. If you're feeling mad, why? What is the thought that you're thinking? Usually it's something like he should want to help more without me asking. Notice how painful that thought is.

I want to do an entire podcast about how to win in marriage. How you win is you make the game I want to give more. Because often when we make the game "I want to give the same amount as husband gives and we should both give equally, and I shouldn't give more". It becomes this game of fairness that no one ever wins because we're measuring it based off of whatever idea we have of fairness for that day.

So I really like to want to give more. Like I want to be the one who gives the most. When that's the game, when that's the mindset that I'm in, it makes it so much more fun to give. I like to think of it as overdelivering.

Of course you don't want to do this at your own expense where you are sort of working yourself into the ground. What it might be is you might check in with how you're feeling. You might say, "Hey honey, let's have

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some fun and clean together. Would you help me?" That sounds a lot different than sort of this expectation of spouse should do it without me ever having to talk with him about it. He should be excited about it. Having all of these preconceived notions.

So check in with how you're feeling about it. Take ownership of how you're feeling. Allow your spouse to feel how he wants to feel without trying to fix his feelings. Then when you have a discussion about it, really listen with the intent to listen, which I think comes from openness, curiosity, compassion. Contrast that with what we normally do, which is sort of listen to respond. Like as soon as he stops talking, I'm going to get my point in.

Again, alone this step will help you disagree so much more peaceful because there's this embedded respect in there. Where we're truly allowing our spouse to have differing opinions, to feel differently than us. With that means letting go of needing to be right. Like maybe there are two ways to run a house, two ways to do chores, two ways to organize a house. Maybe it's not right or wrong whether there are socks and clothes all over the floor.

This is actually something that I continue to play around with. So in one of the books that I read, *Habits of a Happy Brain*. I actually did a podcast about this. You can listen to it. It's called Increasing Your Happiness With Brain Chemicals. One of the examples that I remember from that book *Habits of a Happy Brain* by Loretta Breuning is when you prefer life to be one way. So if you prefer a really organized, clean, tidy home, it can be a really great exercise in releasing control to do 30 days of the opposite. So 30 days of allowing it to be messy and still creating that inner peace.

I do this, and I really like it. Because what I've found is that I have this new belief system around what it even means to take care of a home. Like I used to think that the home always had to be organized and tidy and clean and perfect. As you grow a family and even just, gosh, having dogs and sharing a home and then add kids to that. It's seeing the priorities change and kind of releasing that control with how neat and tidy the home needs to be.

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So I will just let the clothes be on the floor sometimes. I will let the bed go unmade sometimes. It's not always, but it's useful as an exercise to kind of let go of that control and that need to be right. Which as someone who grew up always wanting to be a lawyer and sort of stand up for what is "fair", it really led me into this place of righteousness, which is so disconnecting.

The opposite of that is seeing that there are so many different ways to do things. You can do this in the smallest of ways by letting there be some socks on the floor and not freaking out about it. Really owning any emotion that comes up for you. It's almost like an emotional experiment. Can you feel peaceful with socks on the floor?

The opposite is also true. So if you're someone who actually prefers things to be messy and untidy, what you want to do is the opposite for 30 days. So the key is to kind of basically trick your mind into seeing that there are so many different ways to do things. You can find that connection and inner peace no matter what's kind of going on outside of you. As you are working through any of your disagreements whether it's housework or parenting or buying a new house, it's committing to allowing for the disagreements while still being on the same team. That's the last step to remember.

So if I don't care that there are socks on the floor and laundry on the floor or the bed's not made, and Steve wants them all made and put away, I don't kind of tell him to listen to this book and do it my way. Try to convince him that I'm right. Instead I let go of needing to be right, and I get curious about what he's experiencing. I allow for us to disagree and still be on the same team.

It depends on what it is. You may or may not decide to change your mind. If it's socks on the floor, that might be a lot different for you than if it's deciding whether the kids are going to go to a certain school. Okay. So you want to take a step back, allow your emotion to kind of flow without projecting it. Let go of that righteousness, and then think about the

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consequences from a big picture perspective. Is this something that you want to care a lot about? Asking yourself how do you want to show up?

That's part of step two when you check in with how you're feeling. It's how do you want to feel about this? How do you want to show up? Giving yourself space just like you give your spouse space. Space doesn't necessarily mean physical space. I'm using that as sort of a coaching term. When I say giving space, what I mean is allowing the other person to have the thoughts and feelings that I want to have without trying to fix them. Allowing yourself to have the thoughts and feelings that you're having without fixing them.

So if you feel angry that there are socks on the floor and you notice it, you can give yourself space to allow that anger without reacting to it, and you can decide how you want to show up. You're like, "These are socks on the floor. I don't want to show up as a wife, as a woman, as a mom who is going to overreact to socks on the floor. I'm still going to allow myself to feel the emotion of anger." So there's that difference between resisting the emotion and sort of thinking, "Oh this is ridiculous I feel this way," and allowing the emotion but not reacting to it.

What you want to get to is a place where you allow any emotion that comes up. Allow it to be there in your body, but decide intentionally and be really mindful about how you want to show up. You can use this five step process with any disagreement that you are having. I applied it specifically here to marriage, but it can be in any partnership, relationship, friendship that you're having. I find that what I'm coaching on most is in our most intimate relationships, that this is the hardest because we're with them day in and day out.

So, again, the five steps are to allow your spouse to feel how they want to feel without trying to fix it. Step two is to check in with how you're feeling. Are you mirroring your spouse or are you deciding intentionally how you want to feel? Then you get to decide how you want to show up. So it's

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taking that responsibility back for how you want to think and feel and separating it out from how husband is thinking and feeling.

The third step is to listen just with the intent to listen. When you do it this way, you're focused on the other person. Like I wonder what they're thinking. I wonder what life experiences they've had that have led them to think and feel this way? It's not kind of this process of inquiry in order to want to fix them. It's truly honoring that in step four, there is no one right way to be a human, to have opinions, to feel, to be on one side or the other.

Your thoughts and feelings are always based on kind of your life experience and mental awareness and mindfulness up to this point. The same is true for spouse. So we want to let go of the need to think that our way is the best way because then we're always trying to control everyone else. I like to go to this is my best right now, but I might be just totally wrong.

A question that I like to ask here is how is he right and how am I right? How is he wrong and how am I wrong? How are we both right and both wrong? It's harder for our brains because it's so much easier to just say, "One person's right and one person's wrong." Sort of stake our claim and think that it has to be done our way. When we do it this way, no one wins.

That's why step five is committing to allowing there to be space for disagreements. Of course we're going to disagree. We have two separate human brains with a lifetime of experience and a lifetime of neural pathways that are going to be different. So we're going to have different thoughts and different feelings, and that is the beauty of it. It's what makes it so amazing, and it's also what makes it challenging.

We can still be on the same team. Even if we decide that one person's way of parenting is different than the other person's way of parenting, it's coming to terms of, "Oh, there might be two ways of parenting on this topic

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that my child is going to experience. That's just the way it's going to be. That's not wrong."

So use this process to really work through any disagreement that you're having in your marriage and any other relationship, and it's going to help you get to a place of connection and peace. Even if there are still some negative emotions like disappointment. It's going to be from this place of connection instead of this place from separation and righteousness, which feels terrible.

If you want to do more of this work, join us in Grow You. November 1st you are going to get the Relationships on Purpose course curriculum where we go even deeper with everything I talked about today. Head on over to nataliebacon.com/coaching and I will see you there.

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