



20 Tips to Kiss Your Money Fights Good-bye



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Often when spouses fight about money, they aren't really just fighting about money. Since money is inextricably tied to goals, values and priorities, these fights include issues in the relationship that run deeper than just money.

Keeping separate accounts—"his" and "hers"—and assigning bills may seem like an easy way to avoid disagreements in the marriage, especially when there's been a history of conflicts that involve money. However, keeping each spouse's money separate prevents a greater level of intimacy that can only be achieved when a couple talks about and comes to agreement on the things that are really important to them in life. Therefore, combining finances is an essential part of being married.

Instead of avoiding problems by keeping money separate or by just letting the problem ride, it is more productive to address the issues directly. Sometimes the issues are created by the way couples interact, sometimes they are caused by real differences of opinion. Here are 20 tips for reducing the number of money disagreements in your marriage, whether they are caused by interaction style or by deeper issues.

1. Be open and honest with each other about your money.

According to a survey in *Money* magazine, "71 % of Americans admit they keep secrets or lie to spouses and significant others about their money." That's a great way to destroy trust. Once broken, it takes a lot of time and effort to rebuild trust. Agree that there will be no secret spending, saving, income, or debt.

2. Do what you say you're going to do.

Making commitments and not following through destroys trust. Contrarily, making commitments and following through helps to rebuild trust. Your spouse needs to be able to count on you, so if you say you'll do something, do it. If you say you won't do something, then don't do it.

3. Talk about your goals and dreams; don't just live for today.

Most couples are so busy and overwhelmed by what's right in front of them that they don't get to discuss deeper, more important things like, "What do we want to accomplish in our lifetime together?" and "How do we want to make a difference in the lives of others?"

4. Agree on the important things.

Having an overall plan for your money helps. It's also easier to make short-term sacrifice when the long-term goal looks achievable. We recommend Dave Ramsey's "Baby Steps" (see www.daveramsey.com) as an overarching plan to agree on because it leads to financial security and the ability to have money to use in making a difference in the world.

5. Respect what's important to your spouse.

Sure, you might not care about underwater basket-weaving, but if it's really important to your spouse, it should be in the budget. Determining a reasonable amount of money to spend on something is a lot easier when you look at it in the context of your whole spending plan.

6. Make decisions in advance.

Make a plan for your money before you even get it—it will go a lot further. When you make a budget for the month's money in advance, you can look at it and work out together if anything needs adjusting. With decisions made in advance, emotions will have less of an impact on your personal finances. Doing a plan monthly allows for adjustments to changes as they happen.

7. Use a zero-based budget.

It's a very simple system. Write your expected income at the top and subtract the dollar amount of each category you plan on spending (food, utilities, mortgage, clothes, insurance, etc.). Be sure to include money that will be used to pay off debt or go into savings. Keep subtracting until the running total equals zero. If it doesn't equal zero, increase or decrease items until it does. That way there's no unnamed money floating out there to cause arguments about how it was spent.

8. Save for the expected and the unexpected.

Having money saved for upcoming purchases, events and services will reduce a lot of stress. While emergencies by nature seem unexpected, you might as well expect that one will come along. Setting aside a little money each month for things like Christmas, car registration and kids' back-to-school supplies will eliminate the need to come up with a big chunk of money all at once.

9. Use cash envelopes.

While credit cards offer a lot of convenience, they make it extremely easy to overspend. Once two spouses have agreed on an amount to spend, putting that amount of cash in an envelope and spending from that envelope will make overspending practically impossible.

10. Give a little.

Don't be overly strict about the budget. You and your spouse need to agree on it and follow it and it's OK to agree to make changes. But be flexible about meeting your spouse's needs. Remember, there is no "correct" budget—it is a melding of two people's goals and values.

11. Have some personal spending money.

It's important to have some money specified in the budget for each spouse to be able to spend as they wish, without having to get agreement from the other spouse. Having personal spending money is a great way to resolve differences in values. For example, if one spouse is a "spender" and the other spouse is a "saver," they can each spend or save as they see fit.

12. Review your personal finances together once a week

Today's technology has made it really easy to put our finances on auto pilot. While using things like automatic bill-pay is helpful and frees up time, it's important to check regularly to make sure things are going as you'd planned. Since life won't always go as planned, having a weekly appointment to look things over will give the opportunity to change the budget as needed.

13. Appreciate (and utilize) each other's strengths.

If one spouse is a math hound or a spreadsheet guru, that person probably should create a preliminary budget that the two can look at together. Other examples of strengths to take advantage of include: the ability to see the big picture, attention to detail, an affinity for problem-solving, making things fun, or tenacity. Appreciating each other's strengths is great for a marriage because you can learn to use and appreciate the ways you are different from each other.

14. Seek first to understand.

One of Steven Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," many an argument can be avoided by really understanding what a spouse is saying. If you think your spouse is completely off his or her rocker, decide that perhaps you're not fully understanding their meaning. Questions like, "Help me understand..." and "What would that look like?" can go a long way in improving understanding.

15. Don't "Jump to Solutions."

Many marital arguments erupt when one spouse has chosen a specific solution to a problem. Rather than getting stuck on a specific solution, practice problem-solving together. Brainstorm even the craziest ideas and you're likely to find a solution that works for both of you.

16. Focus on present and future behaviors not past mistakes.

Don't fall into the "blame-shame" trap. For many couples, it's become a habit to point out each others mistakes. Phrases like "You'd always..." "You never..." are not productive. Instead, talk about what's happening now. If what's happening now needs to change, talk about what you want to have happen from now on.

17. Acknowledge new behaviors and efforts to change.

Who doesn't appreciate an "atta-girl" or "atta-boy" here or there? Be patient while your spouse learns new ways of thinking and new behaviors. Make a special effort to notice those new behaviors. It's good to say "thanks" for the effort your spouse is making to do things differently.

18. Be willing to put time and effort into your finances.

Most people who are wealthy spend time doing things like making a budget, tracking spending, checking investments, and making an effort to save money when possible. Managing money well takes time and efforts, but it pays handsomely.

19. Make expectations clear.

Assumptions and unclear expectations are killers for relationships. Don't assume your spouse knows what you're thinking or planning. Good communication can only help a marriage. Having a written budget, that is a written plan for how you're going to spend your money, makes expectations very clear. No guesswork needed. Also, clarifying roles and responsibilities will keep important tasks like paying the bills and getting cash from the ATM from falling between the cracks.

20. Grow together.

Don't just grow old together, but grow together personally. Stagnation comes easily. Read books together to learn new ideas and improve yourselves. Take classes and attend workshops together. Try new things and enjoy your time together. When you have the important things in common, the little things that you may have argued about before become unimportant.