

When It's Hard to be Kind to Your Husband

By: Karla Downing

JUNE 12, 2019

When It's Hard to be Kind to Your Husband

“One of the most challenging areas of marriage is communication. It is an area of struggle because communication is powerful, for good or for bad. And oftentimes, damaging conversations result from one person who chooses to communicate in a way that is critical, unreasonable, disrespectful, or harsh.

It is in this moment—when the other spouse is readying a response—that determines if the conversation will lead to division or connection. I've had many situations where I've had to carefully ready my response. We all experience hard days where we are extra difficult. All husbands have these days, or even seasons, especially if external stress is high. And some of us are married to someone who is constantly difficult.

As I have reflected on the past few weeks when my husband had high stress and was especially difficult, I have a few things to share with wives regarding how we respond to our husbands when they make it hard to be kind.

The first is that we always have a choice on whether to make things better or make them worse. Even though we may want to send back a cutting remark, prove a point, or highlight what we don't appreciate, if the goal in our marriage is to live happily in marriage, then we want to choose responses that build a stronger marriage, even if it's hard.

The verse that comes to mind is Proverbs 15:1 which says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Here are some choices you have when your husband is being difficult, that will make things worse:

You can respond sarcastically or harshly and hit him below the belt to make sure he knows exactly what it feels like to be the receiver of his flawed ways.

You can argue with him to try to get the upper hand and show him how he is wrong.

You can let all your emotions out in full force, so he sees how badly he has hurt you and upset you.

You can threaten him so he will think twice about doing this again. You can clam up, withdraw and refuse to talk to him, hoping he will see how badly he has hurt you and apologize and make it up to you. These choices are all “hard” answers that will only bring division because they retaliate and escalate.

Here are some better choices:

You can respond with a short answer that ends the conversation for now. Your purpose is to take a break so you can pray and process what you should say once your emotions are under control.

When you decide to talk to him, do so without being accusatory, threatening, rude, disrespectful, or mean. You do this by using “I” statements and owning your feelings and by using a tone of voice that isn’t communicating an attitude.

You can choose to overlook what was said or done because you understand where he is coming from and what he is going through, and you want to offer him grace recognizing that what was said or done wasn’t really directed at you but more of a reflection of what he is going through. (This doesn’t imply that you should ever tolerate mistreatment or abuse of any kind, or that you can’t speak up. It is a suggestion appropriate in those times your husband truly is overwhelmed and needs grace).

If you are married to a difficult man who is constantly critical or harsh, when necessary, you can set a boundary to protect yourself when you are clear about what that boundary is. Boundaries may temporarily cause your husband to be uncomfortable with your limits, but they bring peace later.

These are all soft answers because they don’t make things worse by retaliating and escalating. You can’t change what your husband says or does. You can’t change how he thinks. You can’t force him to change how he interacts with you. All you can do is choose how you act and react to him. Your choices will make things better or worse.

Which do you prefer?

Wife Step:

What do you usually do when your husband communicates to you in a way that you don’t like?

Which one of these “soft” choices can you use next time he does something that you don’t like?”