

How to avoid money arguments



If you've ever bickered with your spouse or partner over money, you're not alone. Previous studies have shown that financial concerns are among the most common sources of disagreement for couples. And according to the 2014 APA Stress in America survey¹, almost a third of adults with partners (31 percent) reported that money is a major source of conflict in their relationship. Other recent research backs those survey findings. Compared to other touchy topics, couples' arguments about money tend to be more intense, more problematic and more likely to remain unresolved.²

But money doesn't have to be a wedge in your relationship. With practice, you and your partner can learn to talk about finances in a healthier, more satisfying way.

Differing beliefs

The old idea that opposites attract may have some basis in reality. We are often drawn to a partner whose personality and style complements our own. But differing beliefs about money can be a recipe for conflict.

We develop beliefs about money long before we comingle our finances with a romantic partner. Research shows we inherit attitudes, values and beliefs about money from our parents and other family members.³ We may not even be fully conscious of our beliefs about spending and saving. Early on in a relationship, many couples discuss their views on marriage, children and where they want to work and live. Unfortunately, couples rarely sit down together to talk about their financial beliefs and goals.

But the good news: It's never too late to have that conversation. Whether you've been in a relationship 10 weeks or 10 years, talking about your money history is a first step to getting on the same page about your finances. Some things to discuss:

- What did your parents teach you about money?
- What are your financial goals?
- What are your fears about money?

Having an understanding of your partner’s beliefs can help you avoid conflict and set the stage for healthy discussions about your joint finances.

Be a team

When it comes to financial responsibilities, couples don’t always work as a team. Only 33 percent of Stress in America survey respondents said both partners share an equal role in financial decision-making. Similarly, only 23 percent reported that management of household finances is shared equally.

Couples often divide duties, and financial duties are no exception. One partner might handle day-to-day household spending, while the other focuses on long-term savings and investing. But those roles are naturally at odds with one another. Such a division of labor is often a source of conflict, experts say.

To avoid the disharmony of conflicting money roles, some couples trade the jobs back and forth. One month you might handle household spending and your partner might focus on savings and investment. The next month, you can swap jobs.

Another good option is to share roles equally. Set up a regular day and time each month to sit down, pay the bills, discuss your expenses and review your savings plans. Try to schedule something fun for after the meeting; if you know you’ll be going to the movies or on a bike ride afterwards, your money date will feel less like a chore.

As you and your partner discuss your household finances, avoid using the word “budget.” Some people have negative associations with this word which may set up a feeling of deprivation. Instead, think in terms of developing a spending plan. Deciding together what goals you want to save for and what goods and services you want to spend your money on can make for a much more satisfying conversation.

If your financial discussions become heated, take a time out and revisit them later. When it comes to money, you and your spouse may not always see eye to eye. But with good communication and an understanding of each other’s beliefs and values, you can work together to realize your shared financial goals.

Seek professional help

It’s not unusual for couples to find themselves having the same argument again and again, especially when it comes to spending and saving. Psychologists are experts in helping people change their behaviors and break out of unhealthy patterns. Many psychologists specialize in relationships and marital issues. They can help you and your partner learn healthy ways of communicating. If you’d like help strengthening your relationship, use the APA’s [Psychologist Locator Service](#) to find a psychologist in your area.

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¹For full report and methodology please visit stressinamerica.org.

²Papp, L. M., Cummings, E. M. and Goeke-Morey, M. C. (2009), For Richer, for Poorer: Money as a Topic of Marital Conflict in the Home. *Family Relations*, 58: 91–103. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00537.x

³Kirkcaldy, B., and Furnham, A. (1993). Predictors of beliefs about money. *Psychological Reports* 73 (3), 1079-1082.

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