

Ep #432: Argue Better



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With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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You are listening to *The Life Coach School Podcast* with Brooke Castillo, episode 432.

Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hey beautiful friends. I am out on a walk. I am in Scottsdale for a week, and let me tell you, it's going to be 114 here today. But it's 6am and I am out on a walk and it's perfect temperature. It's gorgeous before the heat comes, before the sun comes.

I kind of live out towards the mountains, so it's a little bit cooler here than it is in Scottsdale, so thank goodness. But I thought I would record one of my podcasts from my headset, which Pavel, who does all my editing, is always trying to get me not to do because the sound isn't as good.

So I know for some of you that's really annoying, for others of you, you probably like these talks because they feel different. So here we are. I wanted to talk today about arguing. I know it seems like a crazy topic, but I just had this great conversation with a dear friend of mine, and we actually had an argument.

And the way that we handled it - the way it was handled was very poor. And we have since kind of come back to the argument, come back to the situation and revisited it, and learned a lot actually about arguing and how to do it well.

One of the things that I said to him, I think a really important thing to acknowledge is that it is not ideal to be in relationships where you don't argue. And he had said something like, "I don't like arguing, I don't argue with people. If I argue with people, if people want to argue with me, then I just leave. I just avoid it."

And because we're both avoidant attachment styles, that does not bode well for connection. It doesn't bode well for moving deeper into a relationship. And so I was thinking a lot about what it means in

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relationships to disagree on something, to argue about something, to be upset about something, and how can we, in relationship, use what we know when it comes to the Model, when it comes to communication, when it comes to insecurity and thoughts, to have conversations that actually turn from arguments into deeper connection.

And so I have some ideas about it. My first idea is I think it's important to understand that arguments are very healthy for relationships. When you argue about something, when you disagree about something, it gives you an opportunity to be honest, to communicate, to open up, to be your authentic self.

And here's what I mean by that. If you're dedicated in a relationship to not arguing about anything, you're going to have to bite your tongue a lot. You're going to have to pretend a lot. You're going to have to please a lot, instead of really saying what's on your mind and really sharing what your thoughts are.

So for example, if you disagree about something, or you're having thoughts about something that you know the person you're in relationship with is not going to agree with you on, it takes courage to bring that up, to talk about that, to create a little friction.

Because it's just easier just to agree. It's easier just to say, "Oh no, that's fine, I'll just go along with what you're saying." And what can happen there is a distance, a resentment, a blocking of what's true, what's authentic. And it makes the relationship much more placating than is necessary.

And I want to say, this applies to things that you're upset about that may not even be logical, that may seem silly, that may be based on your own insecurity. I think it's important sometimes to first of all own whatever you're thinking, own whatever you're disagreeing about, own whatever thoughts you have, but to also share them, even if they are crazy.

I think there's some magic in showing our crazy to other people. I tend to do this quite a bit. It's really just being like, "This is what I'm feeling right

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now, this is what's going on for me right now, and yeah, it's not pretty, and yeah, it's not normal-ish, but this is what's real right now."

And having that safe space to be able to do that with someone is kind of magical. And the key to doing that, the secret to doing that is to own it. To say, "I'm having these thoughts, I'm feeling this way, this is because of how I am thinking. And still, this is what we've got."

What I see people doing in relationships, the huge mistakes I see people making in relationships is coming up with, "Hey, this is how I feel. What are you going to do about it? This is what I'm thinking. What are you going to do to fix it? When you did this, I felt this, this, and this. How are you going to change that?" That's the big mistake.

That's where we're expecting someone else to change for our benefit. Well, when you can come to someone and just share what's going on with you, share where you disagree, share where you're having crazy thoughts, and own all of it and just have a discussion about it, that is true vulnerability. That is true connection.

So it sounds something like this, "Yo. I'm tripping right now. I have all sorts of crazy going on in my brain. It's not on you. This is not your fault. This is not something I want you to fix. It's just something I want you to know that's going on with me."

And oftentimes, someone can reassure you or help explain their perspective or their side of things, and it can create a lot more intimacy. It can create a lot more connection when you do that. And that also gives them an opportunity to really do the same. To share what's going on with them.

And sometimes that will lead to an argument because we tend to get defensive, as if, oh my gosh, she's sharing this with me because she thinks it's my fault. But oftentimes, it doesn't have to be if it's presented properly, if it's presented carefully.

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So when you have an argument with someone, let's say someone is coming at you. Someone is bullying you, someone is mad at you, someone's acting inappropriately, someone's crossing boundaries, that sort of thing. Or you are trying to make a decision together and you disagree, that could cause an argument.

For example, if you're a couple and you have a child and the child has done something wrong and you're trying to decide what the punishment should be, or maybe you acted a certain way at a party and your partner wants to call you out on it and basically be like, "Hey, this wasn't okay and here's why." Those sorts of things.

The important thing to always remember and I've talked about this in previous podcasts but it's important to remember that you have to remember, communication is about what you're thinking, which has to be translated into what you're saying, which can be very different. And then what you're saying has to be heard by them to see what they're thinking about what you're saying, and then what they say back.

It's so convoluted, right? Because we're talking about thoughts, and then we're talking about how we say thoughts, and then we're talking about how we interpret thoughts. So there's so many opportunities for misunderstanding, there's so many opportunities for blame, so many opportunities for defensiveness.

And when you know that going into an argument, when you know that going into a discussion about something, there's space for that. And sometimes it takes a lot longer to let it all be understood. And I think a lot of times, we just want to shut each other down.

We just want to be right and we want to shut each other down and we want an apology and we want to be treated better. We want certain things to happen and so we don't give the space that is needed for that.

And I will say, when I was having an argument with my friend, he was like, "I don't have time for this bullshit." And I said to him, "What do you mean? This isn't bullshit. This is everything. This is the good stuff." You have to be

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able to stay present in arguments in relationships. You have to be able to communicate to each other for as long as it takes to get past it.”

That’s what solidifies relationships, knowing that you can disagree, knowing that you can have issues with each other, and still come back after that, have the communication to come back after that. And so it was crazy.

He was like, “I have never known that. I’ve never heard that before.” And I think a lot of times, when we grow up in households where there’s a lot of neglect or abandonment or that sort of thing, there’s no one that we’ve ever rebelled against or had arguments with. We don’t learn that skill.

And I try to explain this to parents when I’m coaching them, when I’m coaching them about their teenagers. I’m always like, “This is the part where they learn how to get upset and reconcile. This is the part where they learn how to be challenged. This is the part where they learn that you can have an issue with someone, you can get upset with someone, and it can be okay, that there’s room for everything here.”

And when you’re parenting teenagers and they’re rebelling against you and they’re so upset, and they’re arguing with you about every-freaking-thing, it just seems exhausting. We don’t really see it as this is the playground for them to really learn how to argue, how to have a conflict, how to rebel, how to come back, how to know that you can have all these crazy feelings and act in this crazy way and someone will be there for you still.

You can be a human being and still stay connected and be loved, even in the middle of an argument. I think a lot of times when we’re in arguments, we go into fight or flight, and we think, “Okay, this either means I’m going to lose and be hurt, or I got to get the hell out of here.”

And really, good, great arguing is about staying in the moment, in that conversation. Hearing what the person says, even though you don’t like what they’re saying, even if they are blaming you, even if they are saying it’s your fault that they feel a certain way. Just allowing them to have their thoughts, allowing them to maybe be wrong about you, allowing them to be upset and have lots of emotions, and staying, and staying present.

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And a lot of times, when I get in arguments with people, I'm like, "Listen, we disagree on this, but I love you always. We're challenged on this topic and I'm angry about this topic, or I'm upset and hurt about this topic, but my love for you is constant, and your worthiness is pure. This has nothing to do with that."

I think sometimes we feel like our core of worthiness and who we are is being attacked. I don't think that's abnormal. I just think it's something to be aware of.

So when you're in an argument with someone and you understand that there are thoughts in both of your heads and things that you're saying and interpretations on things that you're saying, the chances of a misunderstanding are so high. The chances of resistance and defensiveness are so high. And it's not personal. It's just our human nature. Then we can relax a little bit. Then we can say, "Okay, let me stay."

Now, the more you're willing to go into arguments, the more you're willing to disagree and not just people please and pretend and have resentment, the better in my opinion. So I was talking to a girlfriend the other day and she was telling me that she went on a trip with one of her girlfriends and one of her girlfriends was acting crazy.

And there were three of them. And acting crazy in the sense that she was saying a bunch of stuff that was hurtful. And three girlfriends were having a great time, except for the one girlfriend being kind of mean to my friend. And so no one addressed it. All three of them were aware that it was happening, no one talked about it, no one confronted each other, nobody had an argument about it. They just let it go.

One of the friends was like, "Yeah, I'm having no part in this," and just disappeared. Just ghosted the other friend after she behaved that way, just didn't want any part of it. And my other friend just didn't address it and just kind of moved on with the relationship. And it worked out, it was fine, and I think the theory is it's not worth the confrontation, confrontation is uncomfortable, I'm sure she was just having a bad day.

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But the more I thought about it, the more I thought, what an opportunity there for them to have gotten closer. Be like, “Yo, these are some things that you’re saying, they don’t seem appropriate, they don’t seem friendly, this is how I’m interpreting them, this is how they feel to me, I don’t know what you’re meaning, I don’t know why you’re doing this. Is there something going on with you that I should understand more?”

And I think then, it would have opened the door. Now, I think people are very afraid that any kind of confrontation or argument could possibly end a relationship. And I do want to say that that is not unfounded. There are people who cannot and will not deal with confrontation. It’s too scary for them. They go into fight or flight and they flight, and they don’t deal with it.

And so I understand why some people are like, “I’m not willing to risk this relationship, I’m not willing to confront this person because I don’t want to risk losing it. And so I will pretend with them.” And I just want to say that I think you have to acknowledge that if you’re staying in a relationship and pretending, you’re not really in that relationship.

Some version of you is in that relationship, but not really you. And there’s not a lot of depth and authenticity when we’re placating each other. Let’s be honest, I think some relationships are surface level, some relationships we don’t want to make deeper, we don’t want deeper connections. We’re just fine with the acquaintance part of it, and someone acts crazy, and we just let it go. That’s totally fine.

But in this situation, I think it was a closer, more enduring relationship where the people really could have had the opportunity to grow together. And listen, arguing well is a great way to evolve yourself, to be brave, to say things, to own them when you say them, to learn how to communicate better, to create the space for confrontation and help other people see that it can be safe to have a disagreement or an argument.

And so when I was talking to my friend about this, he was like, “I just wanted to move on. I didn’t want to deal with it. I just wanted us to get back to where we were before this incident happened.” And one of the things

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that I like to think about is we don't want to stay stagnant in a relationship. You don't want to go back to where you were before. You want to take it deeper. You want to make it better. You want to go to the next level with each other.

And one of the things that is important, really important to acknowledge is that if somebody does something that makes you feel - obviously it's your thoughts that are causing this. Makes you feel unsafe, that makes you feel like you can't trust them, makes you feel uneasy with them and you don't address that, that will just fester.

And you will withdraw more, and the chances of you having an honest, in-depth conversation, the difficult conversation will be minimized. And a lot of times, I think we do this inadvertently and we make our relationships shallow and empty because of it. Because we don't want to rock the boat.

But when we can go to someone and say, "Listen, this is what's going on for me and here's why, and I want to work through it on my own but I also want to hear your side of it, I want to talk to you and I want to share with you what's going on for me," and allow for there to be a little bit of defensiveness, a little bit of reaction, a little bit of resistance in the beginning, and then just stay.

And what I have found is when you argue well, you get past that storming moment where everyone's kind of defensive and fight or flight is happening, and there's lots of resistance, and you stay and just keep talking about it, you just keep creating space, and you find your way to each of your own's truth, which still may be a disagreement, there's so much connection that can happen that way.

Because of the argument, because of the disagreement, you can see each other in a deeper, more vulnerable, amazing way. So one of the things I want to suggest is that you go to your partner, you go to your friend, you go to the person you're in a relationship with when you're not in a confrontation, when you're not in an argument, and you talk about anticipating one.

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And you kind of design a plan. Like, “If we ever have a disagreement, or you ever feel a certain way, or you’re ever upset, how should we handle that?” And my friend and I, what we basically said is because we’re both avoidant, we both said no matter what, we’ll come to the table.

We will not just ghost each other, we will not just block each other, we won't just run away from each other, we will have the hard conversation. We will go to the place where we can feel at least that we have heard the other person and been heard.

And there’s enough time and space for us to consider what’s possible because of that connection, because of that love between us, and because of our desire to grow. And listen, if you are someone following me, you are probably someone that wants to grow. One of the best ways to grow is to have someone tell you about yourself.

Nobody wants the feedback. Nobody wants to hear it. Nobody wants to be shamed or embarrassed about their behavior or something that they did. No one that I know wants to hurt anybody. We feel bad when we “hurt” other people.

But if we can stay open to it, it can help us become more of who we want to be. We can use that feedback, we can use the argument, we can use the confrontation as an opportunity not just to deepen the relationship, but to really become the person that is available to life. Who isn’t pretending, who isn’t lying, who isn’t people pleasing, but is genuinely open and growing and available to drop resistance and be in love, no matter what.

Loving someone unconditionally is the hardest stuff you’ll ever do, especially yourself. When you’re being confronted, when you’ve done something you wish you hadn’t done, when you made a mistake, loving yourself unconditionally, having your own back, not beating yourself up, not shaming yourself, but really just being like, “Brooke, you’re a human, this is what happened, let’s go into the fire together, let’s have the conversation, let’s clear the air, let’s connect deeper.”

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So here's the deal. Learn how to argue well. Think of arguing as a skill that you need to develop. Not a thing you need to avoid. And ask yourself, what kind of arguer do you want to be? When there's tension, resistance, conflict, who do you want to be? Because one of the things I learned is that it only takes one person to stay calm.

It only takes one person to stay sane. It only takes one person to hold the space in an argument like that. The other person may be losing their mind, but if you keep your mind, if you stay present, there will be space for them to come back.

And listen, I've had some arguments and some fights where I have reacted in a way I didn't want to, I've said things I didn't want to say, I've been defensive, I've been scared, I've been hurt, and I love that term, "Hurt people hurt people."

When we're hurt, we like to lash out sometimes. And I've always appreciated being able to come back to myself and not have to live with the hangover of that, but to come back to myself and resolve it.

And the last thing I want to leave you with is I think one of the easiest things we can do that is completely underrated is apologizing. Apologizing for anything and everything. Apologizing for how someone's feeling, apologizing for something that you said, even if your intention wasn't how they interpreted it.

Apologizing for something you did do on purpose and just owning it. Something powerful about just being open to saying I'm sorry. So sorry this happened, I'm so sorry this misunderstanding happened, I'm so sorry I said that, so sorry I did that, so sorry I overreacted. Easiest thing in the world.

We let our ego go, we don't have to be right. Apology can bring us so much closer together with each other, especially if we really care about the person and really love them. I can't even tell you how many clients I have coached who are in a fight with their sister and they're not talking to each other and they're so mad at each other, and they've come to an impasse, and I just say to them, "Do you love your sister?"

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“Yes.” I say, “Why don’t you just apologize and tell her that, that you love her?” And their face just softens. It’s like it never even occurred to them. I say, “You want to talk this out. You want to work this out. But you can’t start from resistance. You have to start from love. So what if you just called her and said, I’m so sorry that we’re having a fight right now and I love you, can we talk this out?” It’s always an option.

Love is always an option. And if you feel like you want to be right, if you feel like you want to stick up for yourself, if you feel like you want to make a point, that’s just because you’re human. It’s just because that’s how we’re wired. But it doesn’t mean it’s useful.

And listen, being right is overrated. It’s nowhere near as amazing as love. Loving is so much better than being right. So try it out, my friends, especially those of you who are in a fight with someone, you’re at an impasse with someone, you aren’t arguing well with them, tell them you love them, tell them you’re sorry, tell them you want to argue until you get to the end of the argument.

Have some rules, have some game plan for how you’re going to argue. And then tell each other the truth. Trust me, it’s worth it. You’ll learn how to argue better and the next time you have a disagreement, you won’t have to lie or pretend or resent each other.

You get to say, “Hey, I want to talk about this.” And you can talk about it, you can apologize, or not, and you can move on. Alright my beautiful friends, I know that’s not the topic that’s going to necessarily brighten your day, but I feel like it was something we needed to discuss, we needed to talk about.

I hope you have a beautiful week. I hope you’re somewhere a little bit cooler than I am, and I’ll talk to you soon. Bye-bye.

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