

# Is Your Relationship Affected by Your Deep-Seated Fears?

## Objective/Skill to Be Learned

To recognize when disagreements are fueled by your deep-seated fears

## You Should Know

All couples experience disagreements in their relationships. If you are like most couples, you have many kinds of disagreements. Many of your disagreements may be minor, but some may be so hurtful that you may think your relationship can't continue. Sometimes minor disagreements trigger emotional reactions that from an objective viewpoint seem disproportional to the problem. For example, although Nora and Jake were on a tight budget, Nora frequently brought flowers home when she went grocery shopping. Jake felt that Nora was undermining their efforts to save for a larger home. Nora felt that this was a small extravagance which made her day brighter and she thought Jake was being too cheap. Jake felt Nora was going back on their agreement and was undermining him. He wondered what else she would do to undermine their marriage. Nora felt Jake was being cheap and unreasonable. She was hurt that he couldn't empathize with her point of view and felt maybe he really didn't love her that much. Sometimes seemingly petty problems become blown out of proportion because they trigger deep-seated fears. Researchers have determined that there are only five core fears. These include:

- 1. Extinction**—This is the fear of ceasing to physically exist. The fear of extinction is not simply a fear of death, but a fear of “not being.”
- 2. Mutilation**—This is the fear of losing a body part or the thought of having the body's boundaries violated, or of losing the integrity of natural functions.
- 3. Loss of Autonomy**—This is the fear of being immobilized, paralyzed, restricted, enveloped, overwhelmed, entrapped, imprisoned, smothered, or otherwise controlled by circumstances beyond our control.
- 4. Separation**—This is the fear of abandonment, rejection, and loss of connectedness. This refers to feeling unwanted, disrespected, or devalued.
- 5. Death of Self**—This is the fear of humiliation, shame, or any other mechanism of profound self-disapproval. This loss of Self or Identity may result in total disintegration of one's perceived lovability, capability, and worthiness.

Understanding how disagreements are related to your deep-seated fears can help keep you from overreacting to small problems. Most disagreements can be handled by a simple problem-solving process, an agreement by both people to work on the problem, and by developing an attitude of compassion toward yourself and your partner.

## Identify Your Fears

Directions: When you have an argument or when you simply feel critical of your partner, write down what you are feeling below. Then see if you can identify if there is a deep-seated fear associated with your feelings.

Describe the Problem	What Triggered the Problem?	What Are Your Immediate Feelings?	What Deeper Fears Come Up for You?

## Think About It

Looking back at what you have written, do you see any patterns to the disagreements you are having with your partner or spouse?

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If one or more deep-seated fears are associated with your problems, where do you think that fear originated?

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What do you think would happen if you shared your deep-seated fears with your partner or spouse?

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What can you do to address your deep-seated fears outside of your relationship?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in effectively identifying your fears and reactions?

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