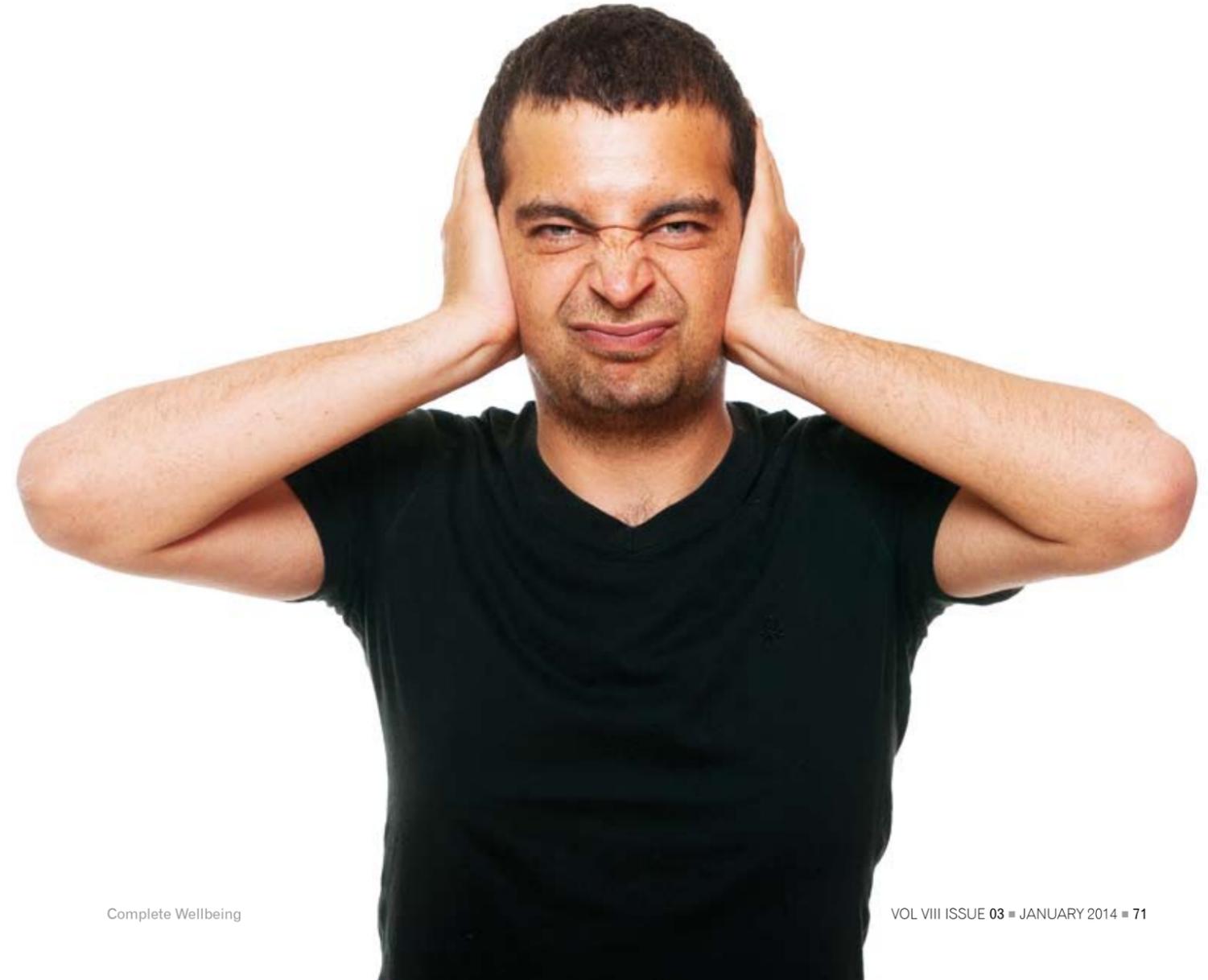


# Do you hear me?!

If this is one of the frequent rants you find yourself yelling at your partner, chances are that it might not be exactly their fault. Here are some methods you can employ to make them more receptive to you

■ By Jamie Turndorf





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IMAGINE YOU'RE GOING toe-to-toe with your mate, when suddenly he turns stone deaf. Since he's not listening to your point, you raise the volume, hoping *that* will kick in his hearing. As you get louder, he gets deafer and more defensive. Now you're really livid, so you crank your emotional thermostat to the max and blast him with even more heat. Now you're shouting to the back of his head.

Millions of women worldwide are painfully aware of the way men distance themselves whenever conflict erupts. The technical name for this conflict pattern is the demand/withdraw negative escalation cycle—or Husband Withdrawal for short. According to statistics, it's the number one cause of relationship and marital conflict and divorce as well as domestic violence.

### What causes Husband Withdrawal?

Men's bodies experience a biochemical imbalance that causes them to flee when danger strikes. This hyper-reactivity is biologically hard wired—its origins dating to prehistoric times when men were hunters and survival depended upon their ability to quickly flee dangerous prey. The angry wife [or girlfriend] is the modern day version of dangerous prey! When a woman bares her fangs and berates her guy with verbal attacks, his biochemistry thinks he's facing a ferocious tiger. This sparks autonomic nervous system arousal, which triggers the fight-flight response. Not wanting to physically fight their partners, most men flee instead.

Fleeing behaviours fall into three categories. The most obvious form of fleeing is physical withdrawal in which a man avoids contact with his partner, stays away from home, or spends countless hours at his work.

## According to statistics, husband withdrawal is the number one cause of marital conflict and domestic violence

The second way is to mentally check out. In this case, the man is physically present but mentally gone. He will appear deaf, dumb and blind, as he practically drools on his tie and exhibits what I call a *no hablo ingles* expression.

The third type is verbal fleeing in which a man justifies, makes excuses and defends himself in order to verbally escape responsibility.

Not knowing that his behaviour is caused by biological programming, a woman thinks he doesn't care enough to stick around and resolve the issue. Her hurt morphs into anger, which only triggers more biological fire alarms and more fleeing. This is how the cycle of out-of-control fighting is born.

### How can you break the cycle?

While *heated* fighting triggers the chemical imbalance that causes men to flee, *cooling* the relationship climate literally shuts off the response. When the climate is cool, Husband Withdrawal magically disappears.

Here are three primary ways to bring about Relationship Climate Control:

**The first** is to identify and eliminate what I call Fight Traps—faulty fighting tactics that heat the climate and cause more withdrawal and more fighting. Fight Traps fall into two categories: Open Warfare and Secret Warfare.

**Open Warfare** are those direct forms of acted out anger such as Name Calling, Character Assassination, Guilt Tripping, I Told You So, and Paybacks, to name but a few of the many traps that I outline in my new book.

**Secret Warfare Fight Traps** are indirect expressions of anger, which heat the climate all the same. These include I Forgot, Recruiting Allies and Silent Treatment, among others.

The sad fact is most people act out when they are angry, using words and actions that are designed to hurt the other. While getting one's rocks off may feel good in the moment, on the rocks is where your relationship will end up if you don't ditch your Fight Traps.

The second way to cool the climate is to Train Your Brain to fight *for* you, not *against* you. What do I mean by this? Distressed couples fall into what I call the Echo Process—a negative cognitive distortion that causes them to unconsciously hear their parents talking when their partners speak. Relationship trouble inevitably erupts when we negatively distort what we see and hear. Here's an example:

Every Tuesday night a wife prepares chicken for dinner. One particular Tuesday, her husband says, "Is tonight chicken night again already?" [meaning: how fast time flies]. Without realising it, she heard her parent criticising her cooking. So, she snapped at him and said, "If you don't like my chicken, you can cook for yourself." And the fight was on!

The final way to cool the climate is to identify and heal what I call the Old Scars from childhood. Old Scars heat the relationship climate and fuel our fights in two ways:

### Old scars make us overreact to minor events in the present:

Through a process that I call the Emotional Lake Effect, the unconscious mind constantly links present-day slights with Old Scars we suffered as kids. Think about an actual lake-effect blizzard that gathers moisture and energy as it moves across large expanses of warmer lake water and dumps mounds of snow on the lake's leeward shores. Similarly, as the mind dips into the reservoir of your unconscious, it dredges up memories of similar hurts that you suffered as a kid, causing a torrent of pain over similar past offences to surface. This explains why fireworks are going off inside you even though the current event doesn't seem to warrant such an explosive reaction.

Because your associations are happening on an unconscious level, your 'feeling memories' are disembodied from the original traumatic events. As a result, it's easy to mistakenly assume that the monsoon of emotions you're experiencing is the result of whatever your partner just said or did. The next thing you know, you're aiming your broadsides at your partner and dumping old emotional baggage onto him or her without realising it. This heats the environment to a sizzle. Take the following example:

Bob repeatedly checks his office messages when he is out with Mary. Mary becomes increasingly agitated by this behaviour and finally blows up at him.

Why is she so furious over a seemingly innocuous action? Because, Bob triggered memories of her mother, who never had time for her. So, when a trivial incident occurs in the present, it surges that already overloaded circuit in her brain, and she blows. Such associations usually occur without any conscious awareness.

### You can't shake the feeling

In addition to causing a disproportionate reaction, Old Scars also make it hard for us to let go of our feelings. Because our associations aren't happening consciously, we experience an emotional memory that's 'disembodied' from the earlier traumatic event. Not knowing this makes it impossible to address the real issue and resolve it. Hence, we remain stuck with

intense feelings that we can't shake. Obviously, this heats the climate and creates more fighting.

To complicate matters, when you aren't aware of what the core issue is, you end up fighting about the overt issue that started the

## To achieve a Happy Ending, discuss your Old Scars with your partner, and the emotional support you needed then and now

ball rolling—the lack of foreplay, his being glued to the TV, the garbage sitting in a heap on the kitchen floor. The overt fight content acts like a smoke screen that conceals the real issue: the Old Scar that lurks beneath.

Until the real emotional issue is identified, you never achieve resolution, fights go unresolved and the climate just gets hotter and hotter.

### How stripping can solve your conflicts

Believe it or not, *stripping* is the way to resolve fights caused by our Old Scars. No, I'm not talking about getting naked! I'm talking about a technique that I've created called Stripping Away the Overt Fight Content to uncover the Old Scar that lurks beneath.

To do this, you Draw a Fight Map in which you remove the content from the equation [the who did what to whom] and instead chart the emotional course of the fight: identify what you feel now; when you felt this way as a kid; and what was going on when you felt this way as a kid [who was doing what to you?] Last but not least, identify your Happy Ending—that is what you wanted and needed from your parent that you never received. To achieve your Happy Ending this time around, discuss your Old Scars with your partner, explaining the kind of emotional treatment you needed then and now. Through this process, you and your mate become healing agents to each other—which is the ultimate and most divine purpose of our intimate unions. A side benefit of healing your mutual Old Scars is the fact that the relationship climate cools down.

For more relationship help, buy her latest book *Kiss Your Fights Good-bye: Dr Love's 10 Simple Steps To Cooling Conflict and Rekindling Your Connection* published by HayHouse



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