

Emotions Cannot Be Our Only Guide In Conflicts

[Feelings were the only data I was taught to pay attention to, so I learned to overidentify with them instead of looking for other input beyond how I felt in the moment.](#)[One of our first real fights was about the amount of empathy we should feel for celebrities, specifically Julia Roberts.](#)[The fight ended with Nicholas insisting that one could feel only a finite amount of empathy and shouldn't spend such a scarce resource on rich and famous people.](#)[But what we were really fighting about is how I felt when Nicholas disagreed with me.](#)[If he disagreed with my opinion, I felt like he was disagreeing with who I truly was.](#)[If he saw how upset I was by his disagreement and then continued to disagree with me, I felt like he didn't love me.](#)[The truth is I stuck up for Julia Roberts not just because I was defending empathy but because I was a complete devotee of her romantic comedies and romantic comedies as a genre, which had taught me that my marriage was supposed to make me better and shouldn't that feel good?](#)[Richard Gere felt sad being away from Julia in Pretty Woman, so they got back together.](#)[Julia felt lost before marrying Richard Gere in Runaway Bride, so she ran before finding her egg preference and returning!](#)[On top of it all, I tried to control Nicholas's reactions to my feelings.](#)[When we're creating our families of choice, emotions should obviously play a role.](#)[We're not advocating for a return to dowries.](#)[Emotions cannot be our only guide in conflicts, whether we're debating big moves or who should be on the Supreme Court or dishwasher loading.](#)[Beth vehemently disagrees.](#)[What was on your mind during that interaction?](#)[What do you think you communicated through it?](#)[Now try standing in their shoes, bringing as much creativity as you can to fill in gaps in your knowledge.](#)[So often our partners are showing us love in their own way, which is a combination of gender, personality, family history, and cultural expectations.](#)[We feel unloved because our partner is offering an act of service when all we were looking for was physical touch.](#)[The reverse is also true.](#)[I was sitting in an oversized chair on my second visit with my therapist when he leaned forward and said, Well, Beth, as a 2 on the Enneagram, you're going to feel this hurt.](#)[I had literally no idea what he was talking about.](#)[More helpful to my relationship with Chad, who cannot roll his eyes hard enough at the mention of the Enneagram, has been understanding the subtypes.](#)[Since nine different ways of being in the world can't completely capture the complexity of the human experience, there are more layers!](#)[One of these three instincts, or subtypes, tends to dominate and be reflected in our behavior.](#)[I want an intense connection.](#)[I want to stare into Chad's eyes and think deep thoughts together.](#)[He wants me to stare into his eyes while considering the terms of our mortgage.](#)[Why do you think we're here?](#)[Can you be sure to use the AmEx at Kroger this week?](#)[It's 3x fuel points!](#)[Whether we're using the Enneagram or Love Languages, learning to see our partners more clearly, instead of depending on how we were feeling at any given moment, has been enormously helpful for both of us.](#)[We became better versed at responding to our emotions instead of purely reacting.](#)[When our emotions were leading the way, the only tool at our disposal was brute force control of both ourselves and our partners.](#)[When we stopped trying to control our emotions, we found more space to observe them and respond accordingly.](#)[Please know that these are still aspirational thoughts!](#)[I realize we all get so many messages about what marriage is supposed to be.](#)[I value this relationship and I want to get it right, but I also don't want to add to the pressure we already feel.](#)[It feels like we're ships passing in the night right now.](#)[I know you've been really](#)

busy, and I totally support everything you're doing. I just miss being friends in addition to being roommates. I hate feeling like I've disappointed you. Maybe we could talk about what we both expect when we visit each other's families. The beginning of our relationship was so exciting. If conflict over leaving clothes in the dryer can increase that pressure, how much harder will conflict over issues of identity or voting or politics be? Is Our Conflict a Strength? We would love to hold up partners like James Carville, a Democratic strategist and commentator, and Mary Matalin, a Republican strategist turned Libertarian, as proof that love triumphs over political differences. But we know that relationship because it is an exception, not the rule. We wonder if that kind of political conflict, between people who generally agree with each other, can be even more painful. When we expect our perspectives to align and they don't, it hurts. I basically blew it in my marriage during the 2020 election. I had spent months arguing in public and at home that in this particular election, it was important to vote for Democrats. Neither Chad nor I had ever previously been Democratic voters, but I felt that the moment, rather obviously, required it. So I was surprised and dismayed as we drove home from the polls to learn that Chad had voted for the Libertarian Party in nearly every race. I'm not going to lie to you. It felt like a gut punch. I felt disrespected. I felt like Chad must not value my expertise and my work. He felt like I was being controlling. He was right about that. He wanted space to vote however he wanted. He wanted me to respect his thought process even though I strongly disagreed with it. It was tense around our house for a good long while. It was a weird period of time.