

Ten Effective Alternatives To Nagging

By Michele Weiner-Davis

Let's face it. Relationships can be frustrating sometimes. They can be particularly frustrating when we want something from our partners and they resist doing it.

And when nothing changes, we find ourselves saying the same thing over and over and over. In other words, we nag. It would be one thing if nagging worked, but the truth is, not only doesn't it work, it usually breeds hostility and distance.

And when two people feel hostile and distant, they are even less likely to cooperate with each other. In fact, a recent study suggests that persistent nagging corrodes the foundation even more than infidelity. Isn't that amazing?

But what besides nagging can you do if you really need to get through to your spouse? Take a deep breath. The following are ten effective nagging alternatives.

1. Ask for what you want rather than complain.

When we want our partners to do something they haven't been doing, we usually complain about the past rather than ask for what we want in the future.

We say, "I can't stand it when you leave your dirty dishes on the sink," instead of, "It means a lot to me when you remember to put your dishes in the dishwasher. I would appreciate it if you did that more often. It would be great."

When we complain, our spouses become defensive and less likely to want to fulfill our wishes.

Remember, talk about what you want, not what you're unhappy about.

2. Be very specific.

When you ask for something, make sure you are concrete, using action-oriented words.

For instance, instead of saying, "I wish you were more affectionate (a vague term)," Say "I really like it when you hold my hand in public or when you sit next to me on the couch while we watch television." Here's another example. Instead of saying, "You need to be more thoughtful around my friend," say, "My friend is very sensitive about her weight and it would be great if you didn't talk about how much weight you've lost when she's here."

If you're not specific, your spouse will fill in the blanks and oftentimes do it incorrectly. Don't take that chance, use action-oriented requests.

3. Set your sites on small changes first.

Don't be too ambitious with your requests or they will be overwhelming.

Only ask your spouse to do something that can be accomplished in one week.

For example, a man complained that his wife had piles in every room in the house. His desire was for her to clean the whole house. That was a gigantic goal. So, I helped him break it down into do-able steps. He asked his wife if she could just start with the home office and do that in one week. She was able to agree to that and upon completion, they both felt great which motivated her to keep going to the next room and so on, until the entire house was straightened up!

4. Match your spouse's learning style.

Sometimes, when you ask your spouse to do something and it doesn't get done, part of the problem might be that he or she is not tuned into your words. If, on the other hand, you were to write your request down and give your spouse a list, it might get done much sooner.

Why? Well, we all have different learning styles.

Some people are auditory learners; they learn through what they hear. Lectures would be a good way to learn new material. Other people are visual learners; they learn through what they see. Photos, written lists, slides at a lecture would be helpful ways to take in information. Yet other people learn through movement and touch. If they take notes or move their bodies in some way, they are bound to take in the information.

So, when you ask your spouse to do something, you are relying on the fact that he or she is an auditory learner when in fact, that may not be the case. So experiment. Write your request down and see if it makes a difference. You may be very surprised

5. Experiment with different methods.

If a face-to-face conversation doesn't get through to your spouse, try emailing, calling on your cell phone, sending a card, texting or leaving a voicemail. Sometimes how you deliver your message is the most important factor.

6. Speak your partner's love language.

Everybody feels loved in different ways. If your spouse has stubbornly resisted your requests to do something, it may mean that he or she feels hurt or unappreciated.

Even if you are angry at your spouse for not being more considerate to you, your spouse may be feeling the same way. You can wait for your spouse to change - not a good idea - or you can tip over the first domino by showing love to him or her (even if you think it isn't deserved).

If, for example, your spouse is upset that your sex life has fallen off the chart, he or she might shut down and not be particularly helpful to you. Try being more affectionate and watch the miracle of reciprocity.

Here's another example, if your spouse wants you to spend more time together and it hasn't happened lately, try making special time for each other. Watch your spouse melt and be more willing to cooperate. Remember that old saying, "If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours?" Simple, but true.

7. Stop talking, just do it.

If you've asked and asked and asked your spouse to do something to no avail, STOP ASKING.

Begin to take matters into your own hands. That often gets your spouse motivated to participate or even take full responsibility for getting the task done. For example, a woman I know asked her husband to fix a step leading up to their back porch. When that didn't work, she nagged. And when that didn't work, she nagged some more. Finally, she got so fed up, she went to his tool box, took out a hammer and started fixing the step herself (within his sight, of course). Within two minutes, he got up out of his chair and started "supervising" her, took the hammer from her hand and completed the project himself.

Stop asking, start doing or start hiring.

8. Emphasize the positive.

Despite the fact that your spouse's behavior might need shaping, there probably are times when he or she gets it right.

Unfortunately, we tend to pay more attention to things when they go wrong than when they go right. Fix this. The next time your spouse does what you ask, even if it isn't perfect, let him or her know that you notice and that you appreciate it. Bring on the fanfare. When you do, you will increase the odds that your spouse will want to please you.

9. Reward positive behavior.

Besides complimenting your spouse when he or she gets things right, you might think about creative ways to reward him or her. You might suggest a special night out on the town, creative new sex ideas, or an offer to watch the kids so that he or she can spend some time with friends.

It doesn't have to be expensive, just a thoughtful act will do. But make sure that the reward is something that your spouse will find meaningful and rewarding.

10. Express general appreciation.

In addition to offering compliments when your spouse is making an effort to do what you ask, it is also a good idea to express appreciation whenever you think of it regarding anything at all.

Appreciation builds good will which is the foundation for healthy relationships where there is mutual caretaking, love and respect. We all like acknowledgment for our efforts to be good human beings and loving partners. Give your spouse at least three compliments a day and watch how quickly relationship change takes place.

So, there you have it - your no-nonsense, no-nagging guide to relationship change!

