

It's not just the socks on the floor...it's the story behind the story.

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An argument can come out of nowhere. Oftentimes, the core issue is not being communicated, which leaves the attacked partner dumbfounded. That's because when we are triggered, it's the fight or flight part of our brain that fires off signals four times faster than the rest of our brain.

What's being expressed is the socks on the floor again, however, there may be strong emotion, fear of abandonment, fear of suffocation, past grievances with you or former partners, even parents and siblings, and the perception that socks on the floor means something like "you don't value my time" or "I can't count on you."

These types of perceptions often lead to criticism, demands or manipulative behaviors. Trust and intimacy are compromised when these patterns are present. Typically there are mindreading, assuming, and unspoken expectations going on.

There are tools to learn how to stay calm and present to diffuse situations like these. For example, take some breathes and in a non-judgmental tone, repeat back to your partner what he/she is saying. It doesn't mean you are agreeing with the accusations, you are, however, acknowledging them. (see *Are you really listening?* for more)

It can be very tempting to defend or explain your actions at this time. However, this will come across as not listening and likely lead to your partner escalating. You are not responsible for your partner's reactions, but you are responsible for throwing fuel on the fire, no matter how subtle you are doing it.

Once people are acknowledged, it is typically easier for them to look within and discover what they told themselves about the situation that was so disturbing. For example, when a woman complains about how much she is doing, it may be because she does not think she is capable or does not think she is appreciated.

That's why when her partner offers practical advice on how to manage time or a reminder that it was a choice to commit to the task list, she will likely escalate or withdraw thinking it is hopeless. The partner is often left scratching his/her head thinking she is being irrational or disrespectful of the wisdom that was offered.

Conflicts like these can then create more depth and intimacy as a partner reveals the source of the trigger and ask for what they want.

Relationships activate our old stories and inner critic. Stories are inner fabrications, judgments, and perceptions. Being in relationship sheds light on our inner stuck places. During couples therapy, I can help you identify the sources of your triggers, help you more clearly communicate, as well as, more effectively listen and address core issues to help turn conflict into connection.