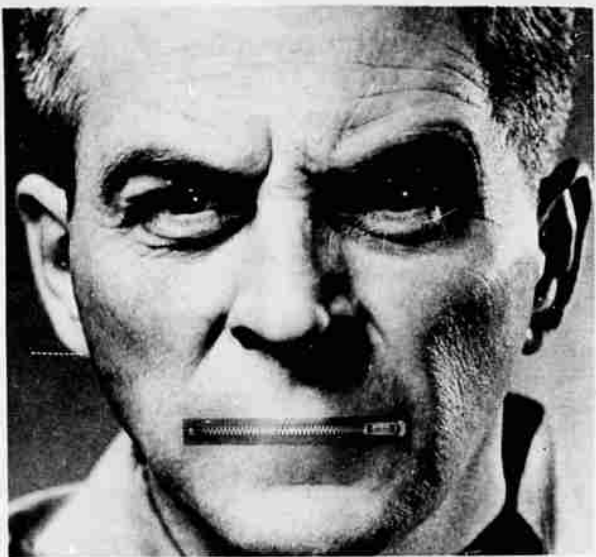




To Beef or Not to Beef—

When Should You Speak Your Mind to your Mate?

By CLARK W. BLACKBURN

General Director, Family Service Association of America
as told to Lester and Irene David

THE PROVERBIAL nagging wife and criticizing husband can make marriage intolerable.

In my many years as head of the largest group of family-counseling agencies in the world, I have known countless unions to limp unhappily along, and others to collapse entirely, because of incessant fault-finding.

Logically, then, you might assume that the best way to insure permanent marital tranquility is simply to keep quiet.

Nothing could be farther from the truth! Keeping a wounded silence when you *should* speak out is just as dangerous as saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Remaining quiet when you ought to talk and discuss can cause your resentments to turn inward and go underground. These bottled-up vexations can fester and grow within you, and sooner or later they are going to emerge in a considerably more destructive form.

For example, a young housewife in Michigan grew increasingly irritated at her husband's slovenliness but didn't voice her distaste. "I simply didn't know what to do, so I did nothing at all," she said.

Her resentment took the form of long absences from home and short-tempered remarks. Bewildered and angry, her husband lashed back. Recently, a furious quarrel exploded for a trivial reason and the couple has now separated.

On the other hand, talking when you shouldn't can cause deep hurt. A California husband said: "The meals around here have sure been bad lately." True, his wife's cooking wasn't up to par, but he should have realized why: two of the children had caught the flu, the washing machine had broken down, and his wife had been beside herself trying to get things done. Quite understandably, she was wounded by his words.

The all-important secret, then, is to know when to talk up and when to avoid talking. Here are suggestions that can help you make the right decisions at the right times.

You Should Talk Up:

1. When you are genuinely irritated by personal habits that have been adopted recently.

Many wives and husbands let themselves slide into careless ways as time goes on. They may neglect personal appearance, even forget good manners. You may rightfully complain about these things. In fact, unless you do, they are bound to get worse.

2. When your mate acts in a way that demeans you or places you in a situation you cannot accept.

A wife should speak her mind if her husband drinks too much at a party and acts outrageously. A husband can certainly object if his wife behaves in an unladylike manner. Both should speak up if either partner makes belittling remarks or funny "cracks" at the other's expense in company.

3. When the health or welfare of the family or children is at stake.

An Indiana wife was in the habit of dropping over to a neighbor's house while her baby napped. When her husband accidentally heard about this, he complained, and rightly. She should have been home looking after the baby. A New England wife told her husband he was working too hard and not devoting enough time to their teenage daughters when they needed him a great deal. He saw her point and, though it meant a financial sacrifice, he curtailed his work.

It's Wisest to Remain Silent:

1. When no amount of complaining can help a situation. In New Jersey, a salesman built a children's playroom in his attic at his wife's insistence, but later found the youngsters ignoring it. For weeks thereafter, he complained about the

waste of time and money. One gripe would have made his point without inflaming his wife.

2. When a habit or characteristic has been of long standing.

If these have not been modified by time or circumstance, either adjust to them or ignore them. It's foolish to criticize a man for a devotion to comfortable but unattractive clothes, if that's the way he has always been. Nor can a man hope to change a wife who always has been helpless with a budget or a mechanical gadget.

3. When a problem is involved about which little can be done without professional help.

It's amazing how many wives and husbands lacerate one another over such weaknesses as alcoholism, intense nervousness, and other illnesses or emotional problems. If these problems reach the point where they cannot be lived with, seek the help of a local family-service agency. Nagging is the worst possible approach.

If you decide to talk up about an irritation, choose the right time. The best moment to speak your piece is when you are both rested, relaxed, and as even-tempered as possible.

How would you start such a discussion? Beware of belligerence. Openings such as "Now look here, dear!" will only increase resentment. The main objective is to avoid hurting your mate's feelings while still making your point. If your mate had embarrassed you at a party, wouldn't it be better to say: "Would you mind terribly if I told you that I felt uncomfortable last night . . . ?"

Lastly, I would caution you not to expect miracles. Faults, even though trivial, cannot be eliminated overnight. Be patient.

So forget what should be forgotten, air what ought to be aired, and never lose sight of this marriage-preserving fact: words can be weapons, and weapons can destroy. But, wisely chosen, they can help each of you understand the other and provide the opportunity for a closer marriage.

COVER:

Ken (top) of the St. Louis Cardinals and Cletis of the New York Yankees are two of the six Boyer brothers who have played pro ball. Their mother's warmhearted story is on p. 10. Photograph by Ozzie Sweet.

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