

Relationship Advice: The Case of Elon Musk: Connecting Instead of Clashing



By Dr. Jane Greer

Maintaining happiness and peace with your romantic partner is an age-old quest. And with the pandemic keeping everyone at home together literally all the time, that goal is now both more important than ever, and, because of the intense proximity couples are sharing, more difficult than ever, too. The frustration people are feeling may come out in unexpected and snarky ways, which can lead to hurt feelings and fights. Take celebrity couple Elon Musk and Grimes who welcomed their son, X Æ A-12 Musk, earlier this month. When Grimes tried to explain the baby's name to fans, she mistakenly transposed two numbers and Elon corrected her publicly. She came back on the defensive, saying, "I am recovering from surgery and barely alive so may my typos b forgiven but, da-it. That was meant to be profound." She handled it with grace, basically asking Elon and everyone else to consider her situation and cut her some

slack. The bottom line is that nobody likes to be corrected or told they were wrong or could have done something in a better way, and it inevitably leads to arguments.

So, what can you do when your partner appears to be hot-headed and calls you out? And what can you do to avoid it in the first place? Check out Dr. Greer's relationship advice.

Because of the tight quarters, things that were once charming to you may now be totally annoying, and behaviors that were already irritating but tolerable may now be driving you crazy. Maybe the way your partner used to interrupt you because they were so excited to tell you something is now hard to take. Or their not shaving for a day, which you used to find sexy, is now a complete turnoff. Possibly you've told your partner a thousand times not to leave dishes in the sink, but they are still doing it, or you have a system down for cleaning items that you bring into the house, but your partner keeps messing it up no matter how many times you explain it. All of these instances can feel like a personal affront. The knee jerk reaction is typically to be critical and to tell them how they should be behaving. However, that is a sure path to a clash. When you tell them what they've done wrong, they are likely to get defensive and counter with everything you do that upsets them. As a result, not only will the initial problem not be dealt with, but now you are both angry and resentful.

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The most important thing to keep in mind to help you navigate

these instances is that your partner is probably not doing it intentionally to ignore your request and upset you. While some behaviors at times may be retaliatory, more often than not they are just a by-product of your partner's being oblivious, forgetful, and by force of habit just doing things their way. This awareness will help you to not take things personally so that you can look to problem-solve ways to help your partner remember the things that are important to you, rather than just being angry at them. Additionally, it can help you take stock of what's going on with them. Are they having a tough day, or are they overwhelmed with balancing their work with around-the-clock home life? By reflecting on where they are, it will help you be empathic so that you can respond in a caring way. Furthermore, this can contribute to their becoming more self-aware and appreciating the impact that their behavior is having on you since you are not attacking them in anger.

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There is no question that the chores at home, always a source of conflict over who is doing more, are magnified now, not only because you are both there all the time and there is more to do, but also because you have to live with the results. He didn't make the bed again? She left the old coffee grounds in the coffee maker last night? How could they not see that the garbage has been overflowing all morning? You are both in each other's face and there is no place to hide. Often the question becomes, whose preferences take priority? One way to deal with that is to choose areas where you are each in charge, agreeing to name yourselves the sheriff of that particular purview, whatever it is, thereby minimizing the micromanaging from the other partner. Maybe one of you is in charge of ordering groceries. Of course, you can consider your partner while doing that, but the actual task might be left up to you. Or maybe one of you is in charge of getting the kids up each morning, thereby eliminating any possible disagreements about

timing and breakfast. Not only will that help you spread out the responsibilities, it will also allow you to be more flexible and open-minded, and therefore able to let go of some of the details that would bother you. It will give each of you the freedom to equally run the show in different areas of your lives. Now, more than ever, is a good time to delegate and respect differences. If, though, you go this route and can't stand the way your partner did something – the way he folded a towel or the way she put the glasses back on the bar – fix it quietly to make yourself comfortable when you can instead of making a big deal about it. Giving your opinion on the right way to do something is usually unwelcome. A good rule of thumb is to offer your opinion only when asked.

Another way to have things run smoothly is to nip negative emotions in the bud. You can do this by giving your partner a heads up if you know you are in a bad mood, saying this is bothering me, or, I'm annoyed right now, so don't take me personally. This way, if your partner is short or nasty or takes a tone with you, you can be relieved knowing you're not to blame, but it is just the space they are in.

Everything has changed, at least for the time being, and finding your own personal space and time is harder now. But if you are able to embrace that and can work at considering each other's needs, it will be a lot easier. Just as Grimes and Elon moved beyond their tussle, hopefully, keeping these tools in mind, you can, too. Or even better, maybe you can avoid it altogether.

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