

How to Dignify Your Relationship Daily



By [Donna Hicks, Ph.D.](#)

Why we can so quickly get into an argument with the one we [love](#)? What is it about intimate relationships that leave us all vulnerable to lashing out against the person we care about the most? Does it have something to do with dignity?

One of the common desires we all share as human beings is to be treated well. We all want to be seen, heard, acknowledged and understood. In short, we want our worth recognized, no matter what kind of relationship we are in. This desire becomes even stronger when our connection involves romance.

We have a hair-trigger sensitivity to when we are dismissed, ignored, criticized, judged or treated badly by our partners.

Add to it that the reactions we have to these insults to our dignity usually happen behind closed doors, and out of the public eye. As a result, the worst part of us can appear in a matter of seconds.

Assaults to our dignity create a fast track to our primal, self-defensive impulses, and we can turn into fighting men and women without even being fully aware of what is happening.

What's the result? We get locked into a never-ending cycle of indignity that is hard to break. We can say and do the cruelest things when it feels like our own worth is on the line.

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My experience working with people all over the world tells me that most conflicts in intimate relationships, at their core, have underlying and unaddressed dignity issues that are keeping them from experiencing the deep love and connection for which everyone yearns.

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This is all easy to say, and we can agree that dignity is important in relationships, but what would it look like if we did honor the dignity of our loved ones on a daily basis, making it the glue that holds us together? Here would be some results:

1. Vulnerability: We would recognize how important dignity is and that we are all vulnerable to having it injured and react positively when it's honored.

2. Assumptions: We would make a conscious decision to give our partners the benefit of the doubt, and to assume they have integrity.

3. Responsibility: We would acknowledge when we have done something hurtful and not assume we are the innocent victims

when the relationship breaks down.

4. Viewpoints: We will switch our default setting. Instead of focusing on all the things that our partner has done wrong, we will ask ourselves, “What might I be doing that has contributed to this conflict? What am I doing that could be violating the dignity of my partner?”

5. Constructive criticism: We will ask our partners to let us know the ways in which we might be violating them, and we will listen instead of getting defensive.

6. Congratulations: We will ask our partners to let us know when they feel we have honored their dignity, and then do more of it!

Feeling listened to, heard, responded to and taken seriously is what we all want. It communicates to our partners that what they say and how they feel matters. We all have to work at it and make conscious decisions about the way we want to treat others and how we want to be treated. After all, what is love if not a mutual honoring of each other’s dignity? It is far more than just saying “I love you.” We need to act like it.

Donna Hicks, PhD, psychologist and Associate at Weatherhead Center for International affairs at Harvard University is the author of DIGNITY: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict.