

The Elephant in the Room

How often have you had an argument about something quite trivial, and afterwards wondered what it was all about. Well almost certainly it wasn't about the thing you were arguing over. All too often arguments are fuelled by emotions that arise from a whole series of upsets, disappointments and hurts that have occurred at different times in our lives. Quite often they have nothing to do with the thing we have just argued about, or even the unfortunate person with whom we have argued. The subject matter of the argument is just the platform for us to express our anxiety, our disappointment and our anger.

Those of us who work with conflict are all too conscious of how unspoken feelings underlie the arguments and make compromise so difficult. They are the unseen and unacknowledged "elephant in the room". For separated couples unresolved disagreements about children or property are often the vehicle for the unresolved pain of months or years of unhappiness. Where children are involved this can have tragic consequences.

Helping people to find positive ways to express and acknowledge their disappointments, hurt and anger can be a crucial step in enabling them to stop fighting, find compromise and start to co-operate as their children's parents. It is never easy but being given space to talk and be listened to, to give and receive apologies, and to acknowledge common goals can all provide valuable stepping stones for the transition to a better future. And what the great majority of the clients we work with want, whether parents, divorcing spouses, relatives or neighbours is to put their arguments behind them and move on.

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