

# Think Tank: Meeting in the middle

## Speakers:

**Amy Hopkins, LCSW**

**Lynn Borteck, LCSW**

**Angee Bell, Communications Manager**

Amy Hopkins: Making a relationship work takes work. Sometimes we find ourselves on opposing sides due to stress, conflict, or just dealing with our differences. If you're looking for ideas on how to meet in the middle, you're right where you need to be. Welcome to the Think Tank Podcast.

Hello everyone. This is Amy Hopkins. I'm a licensed clinical social worker. And I'm here with Angee Bell, communications manager, and Lynn Borteck, who is also a licensed clinical social worker. How are you both doing today?

Lynn Borteck: I'm doing great today. Thank you. Doing great.

Angee Bell: I'm doing really good. I read this funny statistic the other day that people ask how are you doing like over 9,000 times a year. That's a lot.

Amy Hopkins: Oh my gosh. That is a lot. I need to come up with something different, I guess.

Angee Bell: No, no, it's all good. But I think it's just funny. It makes you kind of think about what you mean when you say how are you doing?

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. And if people really give you their honest, honest answers. That's something too. Because usually people are like, "I'm fine." And we all know what fine means.

Angee Bell: Exactly.

Amy Hopkins: So I'm glad we're all together again. And we're talking about meeting in the middle. So how to compromise with our significant others. And it's inevitable that if you're going to have a relationship with anybody, partner, spouse, friend, whatever, you're going to have different opinions. You both have different needs. And with your significant

other, no matter how deep in love you are and connected you are, you're going to have to compromise. And compromise is the way to have both of your needs met and sustain the relationship.

- Angee Bell: I will say, I think compromise is also, it's a little bit of both, right? So sometimes when you compromise, you're actually giving up something, a little bit of something, to make the ends meet and meet in the middle. I think it's collaboration where it's a 50/50 balance. But compromise actually is where somebody's giving something, or you're agreeing on, you'll give this and I'll give this, and we'll meet in the middle, right?
- Amy Hopkins: Yeah. But it's not always equal. But the trick is you have to balance that out between each other.
- Angee Bell: Right. Or what are you willing to give up that it's not going to break the bank. Okay, I'll give in on this, and it'll balance out and make things work. And the end result is more something that is meaningful to you than fighting for that 25%, right?
- Amy Hopkins: Right. So to bring this concept to real life, I had a conversation with my husband, Mike. So listen to this conversation about compromise. Hi Mike. Welcome back.
- Mike Hopkins: Hi. Thanks for having me back.
- Amy Hopkins: I love having you here. It's fun having you on the podcast. So we're talking about relationships, and so we're going to chit chat about our relationship again. Are you super excited about that?
- Mike Hopkins: I am.
- Amy Hopkins: But what we're talking about, the key piece that we're talking about, is compromise and meeting in the middle. And I know what I think our differences are that make us better. But what would you say our differences are that have actually added to our relationship? Things that maybe we're polar opposites on.
- Mike Hopkins: Well, it's hard to say about the differences and what it adds to our relationship. But there are some differences. Probably the biggest one is you are very conscious of every penny, monies. And I'm a little bit more relaxed and-

Amy Hopkins: Loosey goosey.

Mike Hopkins: I'm just a little more relaxed overall. Whereas I think you are a little more of a put your head down and go person.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. Well, but I think, don't you think that comes from we were raised differently. I had a single mom, and I started working really early to make money. And I had to pay for things. And then you, I mean, not that it was ideal, but it was like you had a two parent home, and you didn't really... That's the dog. You didn't really go without anything.

Mike Hopkins: No, not at all. A lot of what I learned about taking care of the business of life was when I grew up and moved out on my own.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah, yeah. For sure.

Mike Hopkins: My mom did a lot of things for me. And then there was not a financial burden or a financial concern, so we had cars around to drive and yeah. There was nothing... Yeah, there's no doubt about that. Had to learn to be more conservative.

Amy Hopkins: But the thing that's good, though, is that we have balanced each other out. I mean-

Mike Hopkins: For sure,

Amy Hopkins: ... I have gotten more relaxed with things. I definitely have. So we've compromised on money. Because I remember when we first got together, you always wanted to have 100 bucks in your wallet. Do you remember that?

Mike Hopkins: I do.

Amy Hopkins: And I would have the worst anxiety.

Mike Hopkins: You about had a panic attack over that.

Amy Hopkins: I did, right? I did. And so I think we've definitely gotten better. It's like I think we saw each other's perspective. Me being so stingent with the money was hard. And I didn't like being that person. And you living with somebody. I mean, but you have gotten more cognizant of how and where we spend money too.

Mike Hopkins: Oh, for sure. And then I also use your ability to be more conservative, to keep me that way by I don't keep a lot of money on myself because I'll spend it if I have it, kind of a thing. So I don't do much of that, and that helps. You make a big difference in that because I probably would want to have that \$100 in cash-

Amy Hopkins: I know you would-

Mike Hopkins: ... every week.

Amy Hopkins: ... still like to have that.

Mike Hopkins: For some reason, there's almost a feeling of I feel good about myself, I've got money in my pocket, kind of thing. So maybe that's a big part of it.

Amy Hopkins: Maybe we need to negotiate a little more-

Mike Hopkins: Because my dad grew up, and he wasn't really... They were kind of poor.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah, he was.

Mike Hopkins: So I think he enjoyed the idea of he could afford to have a little bit of money, and I kind of took that.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah, yeah. Maybe we need to renegotiate what you can have in your wallet.

Mike Hopkins: Okay. We can talk about that. I don't have much.

Amy Hopkins: Maybe not today. So I do have to clarify this one, just one little point of that clip. Mike does have money. He has access to money. I am not totally in control. But he now has chosen not to have a bunch of money in his wallet because, like he said, he recognized if he had the money, he would spend the money. And he wanted to be able to spend the money on things that he really wanted versus just spending it to spend it. But I do wonder if I need to look at his little personal budget again. Maybe it's too strict.

Lynn Bortek: Amy, that's so funny because my husband and I have differences all the time about money. Except that in this case, it's about me going out without any money. I am often leaving the house without a buck in my wallet. And he will always say, "Don't leave the house unless you

have 30 or \$40 just in case you have an emergency." So that's our difference in that way.

Amy Hopkins: Everyone is different. Yeah.

Angee Bell: That's me exactly. Chris used to just give me money so I'd have it in my wallet. And then I'd always just end up giving it to the kids because they'd be like, "Hey, I need this. I need that." I'd be like, "Here you go." And then so Chris would say like, "Why don't you have any money in your wallet? I gave you money." I was like, "I don't know."

Amy Hopkins: And you know what? It is smart to have some money in your wallet. It is. And again, I think a lot of that compromise came in from our history. He never had a want for money or a worry about money. And I did. So when we came together, we know that finances can be the number one strain on a relationship. We knew that we had to kind of come together and figure this out. Because it could have, if we hadn't communicated, it could have ripped us apart. That's how polar opposite we were when it came to finances.

Lynn Borteck: Talking about the differences in money reminds me of another difference in that I was taught that you should never go to bed angry. You and your spouse should always make up before bedtime. And when we were quite young, and I believed all of that, I would be determined that we could not go to bed angry, and I would do just about anything to make sure we made up. And it often led to my making my husband stay up until he was bleary eyed and beyond any reason. And of course, unable to come to any kind of solution with me or together.

And so I learned through that, that there is absolutely nothing wrong with having a disagreement and letting each other's point of view settle and think about it, and wait a day or wait a few days, and then meet again, discuss it again. Because it doesn't need to be settled before bedtime. That rule, I think, went out a long time ago. And it's often really beneficial to let each person think about what the other person feels and thinks.

Angee Bell: Yeah, that's really good. I had the same experience with my mother. She would always tell me, "Don't go to bed angry." And I remember the first fight that I had in a relationship where I went to bed angry, I felt so guilty like I was doing something wrong. And I was like, oh my gosh, it's going to be the end of the relationship. And then in the

morning I felt a little better, and I didn't feel quite as angry. And I was able to really clearly think about what needed to do and how I could compromise and how we could work things out. So I totally agree. It's actually nice to give yourself a little bit of space to clear your emotions and kind of think a little more rationally.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. And not to belabor this, but there is science behind that. So when you're being yelled at, or you're having an argument, your brain flips to that fight or flight. So you're not thinking rationally. So if you allow yourself some time to decompress and let your rational brain kick back in, then you're able to deal with the conflict in a healthy way versus just trying to settle it. So yeah, all those things, all those tips we got when we were newly in relationships, some of them we got to rework and look at again.

Angee Bell: Totally.

Lynn Borteck: Right.

Amy Hopkins: So I have another audio clip of Mike and I talking about our first fight, and how that turned out. So listen to this one and see what you think.

Okay. So I think one of the ways that we are different and that we have definitely compromised is food. Because when, again, I think this goes back a little bit to how I was raised or whatever, but I was a penny pincher. And so our first fight, should we talk about our first fight, our first fight ever?

Mike Hopkins: Sure. It was a doozy.

Amy Hopkins: It was good. It was super good. So Mike, it was before we were married. Well, of course, a first date would be before we're married. And he had taken me out to this pizza joint that he had gone to a million times growing up. And when we're driving there, he's telling me how good the pizza is. And he's telling me about this salad in a bucket. It's a salad in a bucket. And I'm thinking, I don't think I want salad from a bucket.

And so we get there, and Mike says, "Do you want a salad?" And I'm like, "No, I don't." Because again, it's a salad in a bucket. And they bring out his-

Mike Hopkins: I think there was a little bit of thinking about money too.

Amy Hopkins: It was.

Mike Hopkins: I hate to say that.

Amy Hopkins: I don't-

Mike Hopkins: Even though, there was... I don't know what it is. You know what I-

Amy Hopkins: Well, but it was your money. You would think, but I still-

Mike Hopkins: Yeah. Did you know it was my treat? I don't know.

Amy Hopkins: No, but I think I just... I was. I didn't want you to-

Mike Hopkins: Salad in a bucket doesn't sound-

Amy Hopkins: No, it doesn't. It really doesn't.

Mike Hopkins: They just mix it up in five gallon buckets.

Amy Hopkins: Yes. And anyway.

Mike Hopkins: Quite a deal.

Amy Hopkins: So they brought out his salad. And guess what? It looked super good. And I asked him, "Can I have a bite?" And he's like, "Sure." And so I reach over, and I grab a bite. And guess what? It was really good. I was like, oh. So I started to reach over with my fork for another bite. And I ask him if I can have another bite. And he's like, "No. If you wanted a salad, I would've bought you a salad." And then I felt all the shame and embarrassment and all of this stuff. So I sat there and I pouted the rest of the date.

Mike Hopkins: Sharing food is difficult.

Amy Hopkins: Sharing food. That was like a big thing. Anyway, that's a super funny story. But now, we share food all of the time.

Mike Hopkins: Sure. Yeah.

Amy Hopkins: It's almost an expectation that you're going to try mine and I'm going to try yours. And that's kind of a funny story. But yeah, that's compromise right there. Because there was no compromise with your salad in a bucket.

Mike Hopkins: Not that night.

Amy Hopkins: Now there is.

Mike Hopkins: Yeah. We've come a long way-

Amy Hopkins: We really have.

Mike Hopkins: ... for sure on that.

Amy Hopkins: We really have.

Lynn Borteck: Oh my God, Amy. That fight is too funny. I just have to tell you that my husband came from a family where you never touched what was on someone else's plate. And my family was like, "Oh, can I taste that?" "Sure." And you just reach your fork over and take a taste, and so forth and so on. And when he first came into my family, when we would sit down for a family meal, my husband would build a little wall all around his plate so nobody could take any of his food.

Angee Bell: Oh my gosh.

Lynn Borteck: Talk about differences.

Angee Bell: That's so funny.

Amy Hopkins: I mean, we're lucky we survived that. I mean, I'm just saying. We're lucky. Because-

Angee Bell: That was the first date.

Amy Hopkins: That was our first official date. And yeah, salad in a bucket. He was going to want that. But I ended up wanting one. But anyway. Yeah. Isn't it fun looking back now at those silly things you fought about early on? And I think that kind of is a tip that you've got to be able to communicate, and you've got to be able to talk about what your needs and your wants are. And again, it's really about growing together, right? You have to evolve together and kind of meet in the middle. I keep saying meet in the middle. But you kind of do because you're growing together right? You're developing together through time.

Lynn Borteck: Yes. And one of the things that I learned early on to stop doing, because it used to be one of my favorite fighting techniques, would be

to use the words always and never. Like you always blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Or you never blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And very soon after we were trying to get along in our marriage, we decided that those words had to be banned from any fight because the fight needed to be about what the fight was about, and not about a whole pattern or a whole litany or lifetime of things that the person had done.

Amy Hopkins: Oh yeah. Completely.

Angee Bell: Yeah. And for me, with Chris, I find that I almost have to schedule time for a fight, and it's not really a fight, right? I just know that this is going to be a conversation that we're not going to agree on. So I tend to avoid it for a while because he's real busy, and he's got a million he's projects. He's a little ADD. I'm not going to lie. So he's got a lot of things going on at once. And so I just know that when I confront him, I want to make sure that it's going to be a time when he's not busy doing something else. And we're going to have a moment to actually talk about it. So I think it's you want to make sure, yes, you're going to listen to them, but that they're also ready to listen to you. And so you want to make sure when you're going to have conversations about things that may have conflict, it's at a good time that works for both of you.

Lynn Bortek: That's such a good point. And in fact, we have a rule that no one is allowed to bring up anything argumentative with than an hour of bedtime for that very reason.

Amy Hopkins: Oh, that's brilliant. That is brilliant. Because then you don't sleep, and then you're even grouchier. I mean, I think that's so smart. So I mean, we have hit a lot of things about communication. Really we have, like you got to fight fair, you've got to talk about your wants and needs. I think we talked about, and if we haven't, this is a huge one, about having reasonable expectations. I mean, this person in your life is not there to complete you. You have to be complete and all of that. But I think another thing that Mike and I talked about is learning to let things go. And we kind of phrase that with that saying don't sweat the small stuff. And everything is small stuff.

Angee Bell: It's funny you say that, Amy, because actually when we were thinking about this podcast, I know we wanted to have a conversation with each of our significant others and play that throughout the podcast. And when I tried to get Chris to do that, and I asked him if he would

like to be a part of it, it really wasn't his thing. And at first I was trying to talk him into it. And he was thinking about it. And then he was thinking maybe not again. And we were going back and forth. And I was starting to get a little frustrated. And I realized, why am I frustrated about this? He doesn't want to do it. You got to just let it go. And it's just like you said, you can't sweat the small stuff. And so I was a little disheartened that I'd have to come back to you guys and let you know that he didn't do it. And then Lynn, when I got your email, it was funny.

Lynn Borteck: Right, right. Because my husband didn't want to take part in it. And I decided that it definitely wasn't worth starting an argument over, which is where it would've gone. So that didn't make sense.

Angee Bell: So actually it worked out really well.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. It worked out really well because Mike loves being on the podcast, and I couldn't get either one of us to kind of shut up. So we had more than enough interview time with my husband.

Lynn Borteck: It's a another really good example of how people are different, and you need to respect the other person's difference. And it's a good example of, no, you're not meeting in the middle, but you are respecting the other person having a real specific need. And it's not important enough to start a whole deal over.

Angee Bell: Yeah. I mean, pick your battles. It's kind of a weird way to say that, but choose the things that you really want to put your foot down for. Because there are a lot of little things that it's just not worth arguing over. And this was definitely one of them.

Amy Hopkins: Oh, for sure. And I think there's one more audio clip of Mike and I talking about this very thing, about not sweating the small stuff. So check it out.

Mike Hopkins: I just kind of feel like this last couple of years has taught you and I, has taught us more and more about don't sweat the small stuff. Because there's been so many things that we've had to deal with. We've had so many ups and downs, and so many good news, bad news type of situations. And I think that just because of it, because of cancer, because of all that goes with that, we have gotten a lot better about what is important, what do you stress about, and what do you not stress about? I mean, we have a tendency to bring a lot of stress into

our lives for some reason. We do all these construction stuff in our home. We have four dogs. We seem to kind of like have things going on. But stuff happens. And yeah, flat tires happen. I mean breakdowns happen. And you kind of just, and I hate to say it, but that kind of is the small stuff really.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Mike Hopkins: It is. And you can't get too freaked out about that.

Amy Hopkins: Well, I think all my time in hospice too. I think about that all the time. What did people talk about on their death beds? What was their regrets? They didn't regret that they didn't buy the biggest TV, or they didn't regret that they had the newest car. They regret lost opportunities. Memories, meeting with people, spending time with people, relationships. And so, you know that's kind of my mantra that I use a lot is, is this going to matter on my death bed? And when you really think about it, not much is. Not much except your relationships, how deeply you love, and-

Mike Hopkins: The people.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. The people in your life.

Mike Hopkins: The relationships. You're right. That's a good word. Those are going to be the important things for sure. So I guess I don't need to get that big, big-

Amy Hopkins: 86 inch TV.

Mike: ... 86 inch, 20-

Amy Hopkins: That wasn't a hint. That was just-

Mike Hopkins: It sounded a little bit.

Amy Hopkins: Oh no. No, I don't-

Mike Hopkins: We just happen to need a TV for our finished basement finally. And I think that was a little bit of a-

Amy Hopkins: No, no. It's just maybe, I mean-

Mike Hopkins: I'll tell you. You therapists.

Amy Hopkins: I just have to say here, Mike got his TV. It wasn't the 86 inch. It was an 82 inch TV. So I don't understand it at all, but I compromised. And so, see, I can do it. I can compromise.

Angee Bell: Those four inches made a difference.

Amy Hopkins: Huge difference. And about \$500.

Angee Bell: Yeah, I mean, I think it comes down to knowing that you're to have to make some changes in a relationship. When you meet someone and you fall in love, it's great. And you may seem like two peas in a pod, and everything's working swimmingly, and you think you're going to live happily ever after. But then reality kicks in. You have a fight or two. You disagree on a few things. And you start to work through it. But I think knowing that that's going to happen, and being willing to listen and understand and look at other people's position, and where they're coming from. And then trying to compromise, trying to understand where they're coming from. So that you'll think about what possibly you could give up to make things work. And at the same time, hopefully they will reciprocate that and also balance it out. So I think that's a big part.

The empathy also is something that you have to keep in mind, because for me and Chris, we're so different. We're like black and white. He's mechanical, outdoors man. I love books and creative things, and music and art, and computers and stuff. And so we have a good way of balancing ourselves out, which is a great benefit to our relationship. But then at the same time, it can also conflict from time to time. So I know that about us. And so I'm understanding that that's going to happen. And ready to work on it when it does happen. I think it's all based on love though, right? You know that this is your commitment to this relationship, and you're willing to put in the work to make things work out.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. Well, and I do think that when you have opposite interests, I think it can deepen a relationship. Because then when Chris does something that you really enjoy, and you do something that he really enjoys, it opens you up to new experiences, but it also helps you understand them deeper, right? You learn about them in a new way, in a new light. So I think sometimes the whole opposites attract kind of thing is an opportunity for even a deeper connection, a deeper love.

Angee Bell: I think so too. Yeah. I think that is one of our strengths, for sure.

Lynn Borteck: I think along the lines of that, I think that one of the things that I have found, not only in my love relationship, but in relationships with friends, is that rather than set up win lose situations, I try to think in terms of options. Not everything needs to be your way or my way. Each of us can come up with options of what would make us happy. And if we can find an option that we agree on, it doesn't have to be the same thing as we started out disagreeing on. We can kind of find optional ways around what we had in mind and get to a point where it's workable where we can agree on it.

Amy Hopkins: Right. You have to come up with solutions together, right? You've got to figure out what's going to work for both of you. And what works for both of you is that you might do one thing and they might do a different thing. And that's okay. The point of a relationship is that you're not breathing the same air all the time. It's that you're still an individual, they're still an individual. But when you get together, there's this deep connection and love and appreciation. And it's somebody you want to hold hands with the rest of your life. So really it's just about working together, figuring each other out. And like taking care of the garden it's like you can't just throw in some seeds. It's you've got to take care of it.

Lynn Borteck: I like that. I like that.

Amy Hopkins: The grand prize of compromise is that you change, grow, and adapt together. You find that middle ground, you work through it as partners, you become closer, you understand each other better. So much good comes from learning to meet in the middle. Thanks for joining us on the Think Tank Podcast. See you next time. Bye.

Lynn Borteck: Bye-bye.

Angee Bell: Bye!

## Resources For Living

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC. This material is for informational purposes only. Information is not a substitute for professional health care and is not meant to replace the advice of health care professionals. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.

©2021 Resources For Living | 44.27.462.1 (11/21)