

by Anna Shields

EVERYONE'S raving about a new restaurant — but an hour before your reservation, your husband rings to say he's working late.

You're furious. So do you demand he change his mind, threatening divorce? Or do you meekly agree that work comes first and shove a meal-for-one in the microwave? The truth is, very few of us are much good at arguments. Many of us are so busy that we have little time to delve deeply into a disagreement.

As co-founder of conflict resolution specialist, Consensio, I spend my life teaching people how to argue well and engage with disputes at work. In ten years as a mediator, I've learned that different personality types deal with disagreement in very different ways.

A popular way of categorising these personality types is according to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, a psychological test based on the idea that people tend to argue in five different styles. The categories were later labelled with animal names by psychologist David W. Johnson, and I've found it an effective way for people to understand how they react to conflict.

Once you do, you can get better at putting your case — and winning. So are you a shark or a teddy bear? Read on to find out...

1 YOU'RE planning a new kitchen. Your husband wants a minimalist model with silver splashbacks. You fancy a cosy affair with plenty of shelves for china. You argue. Do you:

- A) Tell him he's always had terrible taste and insist it's your choice alone since you do all the cooking.
- B) Agree that a glossy white kitchen might be lovely, actually, and would he like to choose the taps, too?
- C) Decide it's not the right time for a new kitchen, if he's just going to be a nightmare about it.
- D) Spend an evening looking at kitchen pictures to find a model you both like.
- E) Shrug, and tell him you'll compromise on finish if he meets you half way on shelves. But let's get on with it.

2 A COLLEAGUE claims sole responsibility for work you've spent days on, too. You're outraged. Do you:

- A) Fire off a scorching email accusing her of blatantly stealing your work, with a copy sent to your boss as well.
- B) Assume it was a mistake. Her input was probably better than yours, anyway. Congratulate her on a job well done.
- C) Ignore it. Seething inside.
- D) Approach her and spend an hour working out what percentage of the task you each accomplished, then insist on credit reflecting that figure.
- E) Grab her over coffee and tell her you'll leave it for now, but next time she needs to acknowledge your work.

3 YOUR daughter, aged 14, wants to go to a party in 3in heels and a tiny leather skirt. When you say no, she yells that you're ruining her life. Do you:

- A) Shout back and ground her for a week. There's no way she's going out looking like that.
- B) Give in at once. Tell her she looks lovely. But worry she'll trip in those heels.
- C) Ask your husband to deal with it, then close the door so you can't hear the row.
- D) Ask her to explain what she likes about her outfit. Tell her what you'd like her to change. By then, she's missed the party.
- E) Do a Gok Wan. Persuade her that legs look better in black

tights than fishnets, and flat pumps are cute. The skirt you can live with. Now she can go.

4 YOUR first grandchild has arrived! Your daughter-in-law's mother decides that she, and she alone, will be known as 'grandma', leaving you with a choice of 'nan' or 'granny', neither of which thrill you. Do you:

- A) Tell her no. The fact that you live closer than she does, so will see the baby more, means you get first choice. Simple.
- B) Tell her fine. She has a special status as grandmother on the maternal side, after all.
- C) Tell her nothing. The baby can't speak yet, so it's not even an issue. You'll let him decide.
- D) Tell her there's surely a creative way around it if you put your heads together. Grandma X and Grandma Y?
- E) Tell her you're happy to compromise on 'grandmother'. It makes you sound more interesting anyway.

5 YOUR husband has spent £1,000 from your joint savings on a new bicycle/golf clubs/case of vintage wine without asking you — leaving less for this year's summer holiday. Do you:

- A) Use whatever tactic will make him feel most guilty — coldness, tears, anger — while

insisting he repays it from his own money.

B) Back down when he says he didn't think you'd mind. You'll just cut back yourself to save more for the holiday.

C) Storm off. You don't have to deal with this until nearer the summer anyway.

D) Expect him to discuss it seriously with you and find creative ways to fund his hobby — selling old gear, giving golf lessons. This may take a while.

E) Tell him no problem, but you want £1,000 of the joint savings to update your wardrobe, too.

So, how did you score?

Mostly As: THE SHARK

YOU'RE highly competitive and use any means to manipulate an argument. You're great at making snap decisions, but people may be intimidated and hesitate before getting close. Try letting others have an equal say — listening is not a sign of weakness.

Mostly Bs: THE TEDDY BEAR

YOU bend over backwards to make others feel good — often at your own expense.

You're a people-pleaser, but may lack self-esteem. To you, the relationship is always more important than the argument. You'll never win with these tactics. Next time you feel strongly,

speak up. Think about what you want, and plan your attack carefully beforehand.

Mostly Cs: THE TURTLE

YOU hate confrontation and, at the first sign, withdraw into your shell. You're good at defusing tension — but your views are rarely taken into account when decisions are made. Others find your avoidance technique frustrating — try engaging, instead. Pick winnable battles at first to get over your fear.

Mostly Ds: THE OWL

YOU'RE a brilliant team-player and a great listener, who works hard to solve a problem to everyone's satisfaction, not least your own. People love arguing with you! Sometimes, you take too long seeking in-depth answers to trivial problems.

Don't over-analyse everything: you'll exhaust yourself.

Mostly Es: THE FOX

YOU'RE one of life's great bargain-makers. You're great at speedy negotiations to end a row, but don't always look below the surface, which means your style is sometimes more sticking plaster than lasting resolution.

People can find your constant bargaining cynical: to be a more effective arguer, dig deeper into the issues.

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Never lose a row ever again...

Take our quiz to see if you're a 'teddy' or a 'turtle' in an argument — and how to come out on top



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