

Communicating: What Couples Need to Know

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Why Referred

- infidelity
- poor communications
- losses (sexual; material; vocational; spiritual)
- gender role inflexibility
- repeated empathic failures
- long-standing unresolved differences

Top Ten Mistakes Men Make with Women

- doesn't empathize with her emotion
- doesn't listen clearly
- doesn't pick up on her nuanced requests
- doesn't share home maintenance
- doesn't do what he says he will
- doesn't take care of his health
- doesn't have healthy relationships with other men
- doesn't talk to her
- demands she agree with him
- makes unilateral decisions

Top Ten Mistakes Women Make with Men

- criticize him when angry
- doesn't tell him exactly what she wants
- fails to learn to fight fair
- refuses to talk about sex and money
- makes him take up her hobbies
- fails to empathize
- fails at reciprocity
- ignores how he 'floods' when she is upset with him
- blames him for the mistakes of his gender
- tries to fix him

A Story

- about 'communication failures' of a high- and a low-tech nature....

Losses

- physical: skills, capacities, joys
- material: financial; physical
- emotional: friends, family, roles
- spiritual: gratifications
- environmental: the land, the space

Assessment

- everyone experiences losses
- we deal with them differently
- individual symptoms present (or not)
- the role of communication and self-expression

A Story...

- about the loss of erections... and medications... and sex therapy... and then increasing dialogue....

What Happens in the Dialogue

- ask for something that you want and describe how you feel regarding that

What is Said

- “I want you to stop abusing me and give me some respect!”

Generates This...

- explanations
- defensiveness
- escalation of emotion
- a counter-attack

An Attempted Translation

- “I want you to stop abusing me and give me some respect!”

★ CAN BECOME:

- “I’m angry about the way you treat me. I want you to treat me differently (example).” (AND FURTHER DISCUSSION)

Ordinary Listening

- “I want you to stop abusing me and give me some respect!” is heard as
- “so you hate me and want me to leave?”

Active Listening

- “I want you to stop abusing me and give me some respect!”
 - ★ when actively listened to is heard as:
- “You are frustrated with me: believe I am punishing you: want me to not punish, be generous instead”

What's To Gain???

Emotional Intelligence

- identifying and naming an emotion
- regulating the intensity
- expressing using words, not actions
- keeping one's head when distressed
- persistence; compassion
- hope; empathy

Emotional Intelligence

- “I want you to stop abusing me and give me some respect!” becomes...
- “I’m really frustrated... I want you to be kinder to me, for instance... talk with me a little when you arrive home”

The Concept of Homework

- therapy is not dentistry: forget “changing”
- therapy is more akin to learning, developing
- learning can happen at any age
- demands: purpose, will, repetition, failures, self-assessment, practice, increasing success, teaching others

Some Problems in Transactions

- failures to self-soothe
- blaming & criticizing when angry
- failures to be verbal, or verbally specific
- unwillingness to cooperate
- impulsive responses, actions
- unilateral actions-choices-decisions

The Partners' Families of Origin

- children adapt and model
- lovers unconsciously seek out familiar mates
- partnerships are largely unconscious and not willfully created, deliberately sculpted

Problems with the Partner

- biological health issues
 - the withering of aging
 - Alzheimer's disease; heart disease
- psycho-biological health issues
 - alcoholism; prescription drug impact
 - depression or anxiety
 - destructive interactions

Problems with the Self

- real and fundamental losses in functioning
- onset of a major medical illness
- sudden onset of a mental disorder
 - depression
 - anxiety
- catastrophic illness or accident

Problems with...

- elderly parents
- one's children
- important non-biological members
- financial stressors
- environmental forces

A Story About....

- the demands of a parent... the compliance of an adult child... the negative impact

Learning about Care-taking

- the functional limits
- the impact on the caretaker
- dealing with one's guilt and resentment
- time out for caretakers
- the 'professional' extended family

And, Also...

- social isolation
- career changes
- estrangement (from spouse, children)
- accumulated resentments
- post-career meaning and purpose
- sexual orientation
- spiritual disappointments
- life-long character disorder
- hobby disorder
- conclusions about success-failure

Advice

- television - newspaper psychologists
- friends
- self-help books and groups and online media
- great for small, discrete problems or choices
- insufficient for anything associated with...
 - entrenched habits
 - family patterns
 - cultural mandates
 - bio-psycho-social events

Exploration

- of how all this came to be
- of associated secrets
- of the fears associated with maintaining or altering it
- of the shame associated with it
- of the alternatives to it

Insights

- sudden self-seeing, realization
- clarification of unseen realities
- making links
- transcendent common sense

Practicing

- working with conflict, problem-solving
- staying involved with one-another
- maintaining outside interests
- mature forms of communicating
- mature forms of expressing emotion without demonstrating it

Sometimes...

- individual
- spiritual
- group-therapy for the individuals
- marital enrichment seminars
- books too...

Cliche but True

- it's organic, like a garden
 - sunlight
 - organic plants
 - rain
 - dirt
 - fertilizer
- fruitful

**It Ain't Like a Toaster
Oven**

A Story About....

- substance abuse
- interpersonal compliance
- a diminished 'will'
- insufficient boundaries with others

Psychological Mindedness

- acknowledging traditional and scientific models of human development
- acknowledging the existence of the psyche (soul, mind, heart)
- education and observation of one's own
- contact with an other's
- talking repeatedly about this

Relational Mindedness

- acknowledging the existence of the other, especially as different from one's self
- contacting, tracking, empathizing with that different other
- continuing to build the story together
- connectedness rather than estrangement