



MEANINGFUL LIVING
PSYCHOLOGY, LIFE COACHING & TRAINING

Meaningful Living Newsletter

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Communication Breakdown by Karina Stell

Communication sounds simple enough but our experience in the therapy room is that most couples are merely talking and not communicating. They are waiting to interject with their response, disagreement or to say their partner. Communication, true communication, is when one person speaks and the other listens with a heart that tries to understand. It requires patience, as the urgency to be equally heard often overruns the ability to listen.

A lovely exercise we use is one when one partner speaks about something to do with how they are feeling or how they view an issue, in other words – how things are for them. The other is asked to repeat only what was said and NOT to interpolate what was said. It surprises that even with such clear instruction, many exhibit they are not practiced in just listening.

Often, we have to repeat the instruction, so they can attempt to listen more closely and be able to reiterate what has been said. Such an interesting exercise to observe and whilst some find it frustrating as they are chomping at the bit to respond, it is a very important skill to adopt. The reason is that mostly, a partner will respond to a comment in conversation from what they hear as a perceived subtext and not the words spoken. This is a reason that some couples feel that their arguments just go around and around.

How's this for a simple example? Wife cooks husband dinner.

Husband: Where did you get this recipe from?

Wife: Don't you like it?

Husband: No, I just haven't remembered you making it before. It's nice.

Wife: Well I won't make it again if you don't like it.

Husband: I didn't say I didn't like it (getting angry). I just asked a question.

And I think we can imagine where this goes without much of a

stretch. And this one:

Wife: Why are you so late?

Husband: Oh, I hadn't realised. Why?

Wife: No, I was just wondering. You're usually home by 7

Husband: Why? What do you think I was doing?

Wife: Nothing, I was just asking

Husband: Well I'll check in at 5-minute intervals in future.

And here we go.

In reality, the initial questions were simple. The subtext heard was criticism and this has to do with the recipient's own work to do, having hit a sore part inside them.

So, you can see how important this skill is when dealing with major issues. It's good to practice them on the little stuff so you can be ready for the big stuff.

Another thing we notice is when we ask a partner how they are **feeling** in response to a statement made by their partner, we hear a commentary as to why their partner is wrong. Or even more, a character appraisal of their partner. Being able to express how you are feeling without having to involve the other partner is a skill that allows for open free communication. When you state how you feel in this way, you CAN'T be wrong. It's how you feel. It has a foundation in some belief or inner pain, and that is our job as therapists to find. But to feel an emotion, just is. There is no right or wrong about it. Examining what has evoked that self-belief underpinning that emotion is the work of change and growth. But blaming what someone said or did as MAKING you feel that way is making the other person responsible for your feelings and goes nowhere toward developing emotionally.

So why not try out these little exercises and see how well you do. You may be surprised. Good luck!

Shame identified

by Michael Cohn



In today's blog it's worth repeating the fact that everybody walks around with some feeling of being unworthy or deeply flawed or tainted or damaged. nobody fully escapes this really painful sense of self which is sometimes all-pervading in peoples' lives, and in other peoples' lives this feeling comes and goes to a greater or lesser extent, but everybody knows it.

So how do we imbibe these feelings of unworthiness?

It really starts way back, very soon after the child is born, and this infant is helpless and relies on its mother for any and all needs it has, whether for food, comfort, security, connection, warmth and safety.

Some children are very lucky and from the get go, their parent(s) reflect back to them warmth and attention, validation and love and caring as the parent responds to the child's expressed needs. when this happens the child experiences what is called secure attachment, and the child feels safe and feels that it has a place in the world.

But many children are born into dysfunctional families where there is alcoholism or acrimony between the partners or extreme poverty where the parents don't have the wherewithal to be in contact with the child and they work so hard they come back exhausted and ignore the child other than just giving the child food. overtime this engenders fear confusion in the child and the child begins to develop a self-

image that will ultimately lead to its experiencing that there's something very wrong with it.

This becomes more pronounced as the child begins to grow and instead of it's being met with warmth, validation, love appreciation, it faces a hostile or indifferent and neglectful parent.

The helpless child views its parents as God-like and wonderful, it begins to make the association that if the parents shout at it, are angry at it, are unresponsive, there must be something very wrong with it, and this is the font of all shame.

Parental rejection can be very subtle and limited to merely failing to respond to the child's expressed needs and feelings. More pernicious is subjecting the child to the parents fighting with each other, or angry with the world, or drunk and drug addled, at all times utterly oblivious to the child who looks to them for succour, and love. The extreme version is the utterly abusive parents who scream at the child, who tell the child its bad, who blame the child for the parents own failures and negative feelings, and who abuse the child in other ways including hitting the child.

Children raised in that environment develop deep shame within them, awful feelings of extreme low self-worth, heartbreaking feelings of being tainted and not being not good enough and indeed not even worthy of a place in the world or in society.

In ending it's probably useful to note that there is not a human being alive who does not carry some small remnant of this feeling inside them because even deeply loving caring and consistent parenting does involve on numerous occasions, the prohibiting of certain behaviour and the correction and the guidance and the education of a child and inevitably either through parental inattendance or parental projection, there is a flow-on effect and the child develops some feeling of "I did wrong I'm not good enough and that is why my parents of correcting me"

So how do we begin to live effectively with these feelings of shame?

That will be the subject of the next blog.

For those of you who don't follow us on Facebook – a treasure from this month:



Newsletters will now be quarterly, so have a wonderful three months!

Michael and Karina