

Stronger Relationships

Workbook

"The most painful thing is losing yourself in the process of loving someone too much, and forgetting that you are special too"
Ernest Hemingway

Nude-Thinking Counseling

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workbook



INTRODUCTION

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Communication

The fact that I haven't chosen to discuss this subject here is no indication of its importance. In many relationships it is the broken down communication that is at the heart of their issues. A very easy example of that is parents and their rebellious teenage kids. We can all relate to that one, I think, and imagine the period where the two simply speak completely different languages which can lead to all kinds of hurt and misunderstanding in the relationship.

Tone & Style

Keep an open mind as I take you back to the days when we humans were nomads, living in much more primitive times. Men were built to hunt, so their communication was directive, solution oriented (how do we kill the beast), limited (sound would scare off the prey) and celebratory. The women used language quite differently. They noticed bushes with berries that would be ripe in a few weeks, they cared for the children in the tribe, they shared the campsite workload and their communication was much more geared to sharing information, like the location of that bush, as the survival of the tribe needed to be priority.

In modern days these roles have been completely changed and we, in the West, tend to share many tasks. So rather than saying that men communicate one way and women another, let us interpret this knowledge as a more masculine and feminine way of communication. And in a relationship you will discover which has your partner/friends/colleagues preference. Knowing this will help you understand that the feminine style needs listening to, is going to be very detailed, might not feel relevant to you at that moment. When listening with a masculine mindset you look for the key message (where is a good prey) and try to find a solution. Have you ever heard somebody say 'I don't want you to solve anything, just listen to me', that is a prime example of two different communication styles clashing.

And when a masculine style is asked how their day was, there will be an answer, but it will not be a detailed report of the day. It is not that they don't want to share, they are! And if you are listening with a feminine communication preference, then it helps you to understand that, to know that your partner/friend/etc is not holding things back, but has told you what they feel will answer your question.

Especially in romantic relationships we tend to focus on developing our ability to make ourselves understood, to share our deepest thoughts and feelings, to allow the other to see inside us through communication. And even as we do so, we will still discover that we each have our own preference in how we express things, in the actual words we use, how many we use, and often in the colourfulness of them. People can develop incredible communication skills, but in a

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personal and emotional setting they are likely to use their more natural style preference. So spending a little time on understanding this from each other is time well spend.

You probably know this, but just in case. Communication is much more than the words we use. Those are actually only 7% of what we register. And yet so important to get right. So what else is there to communication? Well if you can believe it, 55% is your body language and 38% your tone.

Now what is tone? It is a mix of the speed at which you talk, its rhythm, your pitch, volume, clarity, all those kinds of things. Imagine you are listening to somebody whining about something. You probably did not form words while you imagined it, but you did imagine the tone. What your mind is looking for is congruence. Do the words match the tone and body language? When you find yourself in an argument over what was said or not, it is usually an argument about an in-congruence that was seen or heard. And the interpretation of that is what causes many miscommunications.

Exercise 11

Go to the video and follow the instructions.

Afterwards you might want to do this exercise with your partner, discover together and discuss what you would prefer your partner to do when they interpret your communication differently then what you believe you are trying to say.

Time & Place

It is generally known that sexual issues should not be discussed in the bedroom. Knowing what not to do is good, knowing what is best to do is even better. Yet a lot of advise is vague like 'never go to bed angry'. Does that mean you should resolve things before sharing a bed again, before the evening, or not to have a heated discussion before bedtime? I say 'Fuckit'.

Understanding what is the best time to talk is something very personal. It is important that you are ready to voice whatever is bugging you, to be able to speak out without placing blame or only living the emotions. Blame stops any discussion, your partner will go into defence mode and that will not lead to understanding each other. And emotions are part of being human, but being all emotion is a difficult place to be when you also want to be open to what the other is saying and feeling. It can also become a manipulative situation where your partner is afraid to be honest and simply agree. When you want to share your emotions it is perfectly acceptable to tell your partner you are not ready to talk yet, that you are still processing, but that you would like to be held, supported, kept safe, etc.

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Then when you are ready to talk, your partner may not. So do you have to be on the same page? Not necessarily. As long as you are willing to accept that your partner may just listen, or perhaps even mess up on that and merely be in the room with you, you can choose to talk. And then give your partner their room to process and respond whenever ready. This approach may seem awkward but it has its benefits. Both of you get to share at your own pace. There is no pressure for an answer or resolution in the moment.

Another approach is setting a time together when you will both be available for and open to each other. Knowing that this time is set aside can give peace of mind, allows you to prepare, and deal with distracting stuff beforehand. It is often how we deal with issues we want to discuss with colleagues, but when it comes to our partners we tend to have different expectations. But just because you expect them to be available, does not mean that they will be.

How conscious are you of the setting in which you will have a good talk? Do you feel that any place is good because you know each other so well? How does your partner react to different environments and do you take that into account? A therapist will pay attention to the way they set up a room before receiving their clients. This is to facilitate safety, connection, personal space. Discussing financial decisions in the breakfast rush hour at home with your kids looking for their sneakers is not ideal. And yet in the busy lives we lead we do many things without giving them any thought, we see a moment of contact and grab it. 8 out of 10 times this will be perfectly fine when there are no unresolved issues, when there is harmony, when the subject is not too emotional. I know this makes sense to you, so let this be a reminder to pay more attention to the setting you choose. And if you find yourself about to be a bit clumsy, laugh it off and simply say 'I love you' to your partner and 'I just realised I was about to start a conversation we should not be having here. It will wait'.

Frequency needs

Too often it is assumed that women have a greater need for talking than men do. Bollocks, we all have different needs at different times. In periods of great change and growth there may be more to be shared, to be discovered together and more talk needed to stay connected. But even saying that is an assumption. I hate those. What do you need? Do you prefer long talks, little surprise notes, a quick text/app, a voicemail, an email or even a letter. The difference between these are felt immediately. And your need for each can be just as diverse as your need for how often you desire them.

Let me give you a personal example:

I am extremely visual, so I much prefer a Skype call to a regular call. I will be less distracted and more present when I can focus on the person involved. My practical nature loves texting/apping quick short messages. It makes me feel connected and yet offers me the freedom to get on

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with my day. An in-depth chat is certainly on my list of preferences, yet I prefer them to be 1on1 and only when I have cleared time. Time restrains influence how deep I am willing to go.

This is stuff I share with the people I am in relationships with. And I ask them to let me know their needs and preferences. And they may not match, there is that chance. It opens up the conversation of what you are willing to compromise on and what not. Setting clear boundaries and managing expectations limits the opportunity for hurt and disappointment to show up. Unless you keep expecting your partner to surprise you, to be different than what they have said. That is setting yourself up, please don't do it.

Exercise 12

Have a look at the 5 closest people in your life (excl your kids here please) and work out what your preference is in regards to the way, the frequency, the time, the place you enjoy communicating with them. And does that match your current approach? Have you ever expressed that to them? Have you asked them what they would prefer? If not, what is stopping you from doing so and what would you need to get past that?

Arguments

Some couples fight like cats and dogs, others have heated discussions, and some never disagree. It is in both extremes of that scale that I would like to pose a few questions.

Fighting, raised voices, can become a lifestyle in some relationships. When you have come to the point where each irritation, each little disagreement is communicated through snide remarks, raised voices, slamming doors etc, then it is to be questioned how much actual interaction is still taking place and how much respect you still have for each other. Is there still a message that you are trying to give your partner? And is what you are saying what you actually mean to say, is that what you want them to hear? Often we get so tied up in being right, being seen, being heard that we fuss over the things that don't even matter to us that much, we just want to be right. It is a pattern that has emerged and we cannot get out of without feeling that it would be 'giving in'. Communicating has become a competition.

It is perfectly fine to disagree. You are your own person and you have your point of view. Voicing this is what creates an understanding and a dynamic in the relationship that brings growth for both of you. But being in a relationship also means that you understand that it is just as valid for your partner to have a point of view, to see things their way. And the art here is to express yourself without placing blame, without putting responsibility outside yourself, and allowing space to hear and empathise with the others standpoint.

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Somehow we feel that there always has to be a winner in these matters, I disagree. Sometimes it is fine to agree to disagree. Other matters require a compromise. And yes there are issues where you have to come to a joined point of view, many times this is what I hear parenting requires. I am no expert in that field, so I shall take that advise as being solid. The point here is, discover where it is needed and where you can kiss and laugh at the differences.

Some of you always agree. Or do you? A relationship can become so symbiotic that you forget where one begins and the other ends. The same can happen to your own ideas, your dreams, your priorities in life. And it is beautiful to find a partner that is on the same wavelength, someone who sees life the same way. But in the end, you are not the same person, there will be some variations. The question is to what extend you allow yourself to explore those. Do you fear the loss of your harmony and connection if you choose not to always prioritise the relationship? Or do you so dislike confrontation that you avoid it at any cost? I am not going to encourage you to disrupt your life and your ways, only to question yourself and what it is that you are not allowing in your life. Any decision you mak from there will at least be a more conscious one.

Arguments will happen for most relationships. They are not the end of the world. They can lead to fabulous make-up-sex. It is when we are so disconnected, or angry, that we no longer make the effort to even get into things that damage to the relationship shows itself.

Exercise 13

What are the subjects you will argue about most?

According to several sources most couples argue about:

- Sex
- Money
- Relatives
- Housework
- False memory syndrome (how you remember things happened)
- Blame addiction (not owning your part in the situation)
- The children
- Holidays
- Interior Design

What do you do when you feel cornered?

How do you express to your partner that you are uncomfortable with the way the fight is going?

How would you like to deal with issues in the relationship? And what would that take?

Here is another coach on the subject <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzX7TxTX5oI>