

Healthy Relationships: Some Pearls to Enhance Your Connection

As Valentine's day approaches, take a few moments to check in on your relationship, both with yourself and your partner. What is going on when conflict arises? There is often blame, competition to be right or perhaps one partner gives in and eventually resentment boils over. Anger drives and fuels the conflict, which may escalate or move underground.

Where does conflict resolution begin? I recommend that each person identify how they are feeling and use "I" statements to express those feelings. There is no right or wrong about feelings. There are five basic feelings: sadness, anger, fear, glad and sexual feelings. There are many permutations of each feeling such as frustration, irritation, resentment, anxiety, terror, panic, tearful, grief, hurt, joy,

delight, happiness.

The feeling most often identified is anger or resentment. Anger is a secondary feeling and I often ask each person what feeling is underneath the anger. When one person expresses "I feel hurt when I experience you don't hear

and Joe come in for couple's therapy and as the couple begins to identify the problem Judy says "You never listen to me." Joe becomes exasperated and says "I can never do anything right with you." Now we have two different problems being expressed.

Using their new tools, the following dialogue occurs. Judy: "I feel frustrated when I experience you don't hear me." She becomes tearful and says, "I feel hurt and think I am not important to you." Joe: "I am hearing you now. You are so important to me." They make eye contact and both become tearful.

After connecting, Judy says "I need for you to look at me and that way I know that you hear me." Joe:

"I can do that. When I forget, will you remind me?" Judy: "Yes, how can I remind you in a way that you can receive the reminder?" Joe: He smiles and says "tap me on the shoulder and remind me to look at you." While this situation can be resolved

All's Well
Health for Body,
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by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND



through facilitation, it also becomes important to educate both partners about how they take in information. Judy receives information visually and Joe is kinesthetic. We then talk about how to communicate in ways the other person can hear you.

Relationships are a magnificent vehicle for growing and evolving. We are often drawn to a partner, who has characteristics or behavior patterns similar to the parent with whom we have had the most difficulty. When this occurs, one is easily triggered and reacts in the old way, aborting the present situation. This reaction will often cause the other person to be triggered and then conflict ensues and an intricate web of arguments and behaviors block contact, intimacy, leaving both partners feeling unloved and unlovable. When each person becomes aware of their pattern

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me," the other person can then open to that individual. There is now a path where conflict

can begin to be resolved. Underneath all conflict is an unmet need. When the unmet need can be met, the conflict can be resolved. I often have individuals express what they need and this may include asking the other for what s/he needs. The other person then has the opportunity to say yes or no.

What does this look like in real life? Judy

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Winter: A Time For Socializing

By Anita Legsdin

What does it mean to be in harmony with the seasons? Vigorous growth in spring, maturity and ripening in the summer, harvesting in the fall, and collapsing from exhaustion in the winter?

If you browse the web for keywords for the winter season, the majority of writings use words like withdrawal, inner life, solitude, meditation, fear, hibernation, waiting. "Winter is a time for rest and retreat," says one web site. On the one hand, that's true, using the analogy of the earth and its cycles; but on the other hand, how solitary, how depressing! Isolation? Rest? A rest equated with cold doesn't seem like true rest to me. But if you examine old country life styles, you can find an alternate, more positive twist on this theme for the winter season. Rest and withdrawal don't have to be boring or stern.

I am of Latvian ancestry. Women from the older generation, who were born in Latvia and fled during World War II because of the Russian invasion, tell of winter traditions in the old country. There even is a special word to describe it: vakarot. The root, vakar, means "evening." Vakarot is a verb, difficult to translate. Essentially, the word means "to gather after sunset, to do handcrafts."

In the countryside, in a farming community, the land is indeed hibernating during winter, waiting for longer, warmer days and new growth. By wintertime, crops have been



Anita Legsdin says winter doesn't have to be boring. Try being active and creative by knitting, spinning, or weaving as well as getting in some extra snooze time.

harvested, fruits and vegetables have been preserved. There is no longer any need to work on the land (besides, it's frozen anyway). In Latvia, 57 degrees North latitude, nights are even longer than they are here in Seattle. At winter solstice, the sun doesn't rise until nearly 11 a.m., and sets around 3:30 p.m. Yikes! What does one do for that long a time in the dark?

Well, one goes to visit one's neighbors, of course. It's a time for socializing, bringing snacks, fixing coffee or tea, and working on your knitting, crocheting, spinning, or weaving. You can still be creative and active, you don't need to go to bed at 4 in the afternoon and

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Healthy Relationships

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of reaction, then s/he can change it. This leads to self-growth and deeper intimacy in partnership.

When I work with couples I remind them that each one has their own life and then they have their life together. Sometimes differentiating self from the other or self from the partnership becomes confusing and seeds emotional outbursts. Wholeness comes from self-care, self-love and self-esteem. Two whole people coming together, who want to connect and be themselves provides fertile ground for intimate sexual relations. There is a balance that can be found for each individual in relationship such that each is getting their own needs met and the partnership needs are also being met.

Letting your self be known, "in to me see" (intimacy) may be the cornerstone of sexual intimacy. Knowing yourself and being willing to share that self, plus the depth of the connection with your partner provides meaning to the sexual experience. Emotional presence during the sexual experience affects both genital function and satisfaction. If you have unresolved issues, perhaps

a history of sexual abuse, then these issues limit your sexual pleasure and may also intrude upon your relationship. You then have the opportunity to work through those issues and discover your sexuality anew. There are times in a relationship when it is important to do individual work and this will further enhance couples counseling.

I often think that the health of a relationship can be ascertained by the sexual relationship of the couple. Sexuality has both biologic and psychological components. I happen to think the psychological is more pertinent in committed relationships. The more meaningful the connection between two people, the more emotional energy is available to engage physically. Desire and passion affects stimulation.

When you know yourself and your partner, then you can choose how to engage your partner. How you engage your partner affects the

sexual experience. Perhaps a satisfying sexual life begins in connection and develops as each partner learns how to express themselves sexually with each other.

Let us all take time this Valentine's season to check in on your relationships. Celebrate love, passion and desire for your partner, plus the ongoing commitment and adventure of growing together.

Moirá Fitzpatrick is a psychologist and a naturopathic physician. She is giving free lecture at several Puget Sound co-ops. The title of the lecture is "The Seasons of A Woman's Life" and is about the transitions women go through in their lives to include pre-menstrual, post-partum, perimenopause and menopause. Feb. 16, PCC Issaquah; Feb. 18, PCC Greenlake; Feb. 19, PCC W. Seattle; March 2, PCC Redmond. She can be reached at (206) 525-5576, www.theemeraldcenter.com. She welcomes your ideas for



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