

RELATIONSHIP ADVICE FOR COUPLES

By

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I have written this book to help intelligent members of the general public improve their relationship with their partner. It captures the very essence of what I have learned as a couples counsellor and mediator over many years. It contains clear practical advice which has been proven in the 'real world'. I feel sure you will find it very interesting and a sound basis for constructive discussions with your partner.



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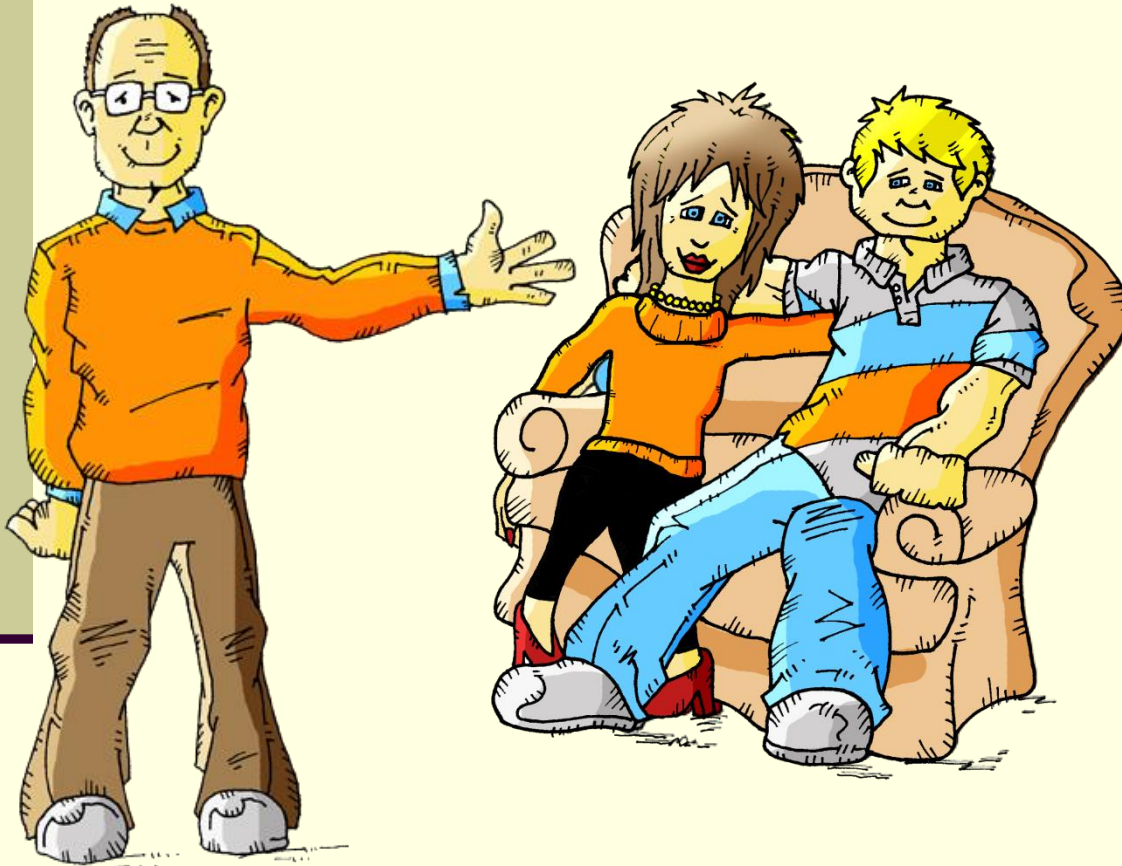
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'Successful relationships aren't successful because they are problem free. They are successful because the couple have learned how to discuss the problems constructively'.

Successful Relationships Are About Successful Dialogue



My aims in writing this book



- Provide practical relationship advice in everyday language and easy to remember format.
- Enable couples to understand themselves and each other better.
- Help couples learn to how to resolve issues by constructive discussion.

Illustrations by
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Discuss your progress monthly

[Pages 79 - 87 should help you do this]

1. Do you feel better about the relationship?
2. Are fall-outs less severe than they were?
3. Do fall-outs happen less often than they did?
4. Are fall outs more quickly recovered from?
5. Have you made helpful changes?
6. Has your partner made helpful changes?
7. Do you feel that you understand each other better than you did?
8. Are you better able to control your reaction when feeling angry, frustrated or hurt?
9. Are you better able to discuss issues without ending up falling out?
10. Do you use setbacks as learning opportunities?

The results of this Progress Monitor will indicate whether you need to consider professional help

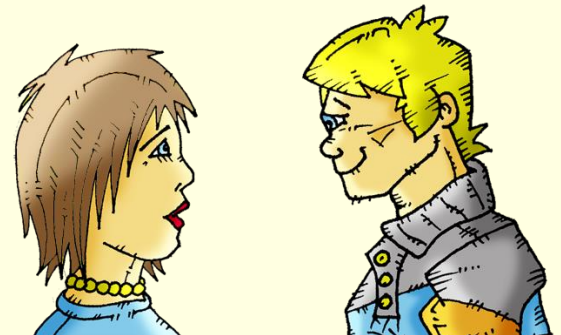
Evaluate progress against each question 1 - 10

0 = No 1 = Some improvement 2 = Big improvement 3 = OK Now

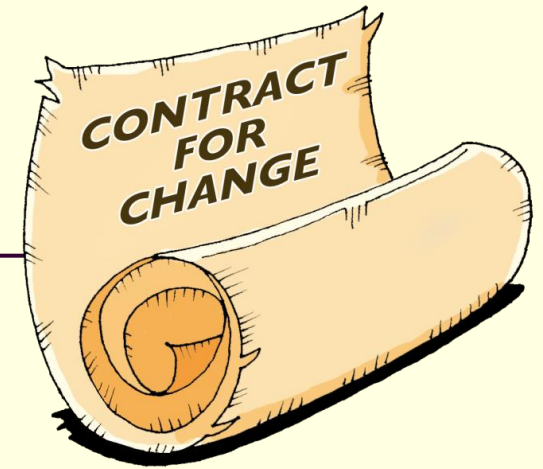
Keys to improving your relationship

- Learn to use the relationship management tools on the [next page](#)
- Develop the 'right attitude' to each other and the relationship 21 - 36
- Listen empathically even when you find it impossible to agree 49 - 64
- Be assertive in getting your needs met 65 - 78
- Learn to discuss things constructively 79 - 87
- Learn to control what you say and do when angry or hurt 142
- Reduce stress levels with deep relaxation audio downloads 141 - 146
- Release anger and hurt in safe ways 159 - 166

You should also consider getting couples counselling or personal therapy



Essential relationship management tools



In this book you will find details of tools and techniques to use in improving your relationship. Essential amongst these are the following :

1. Progress Monitor 5
2. How to be loved, feel valued and be heard 22 - 23
3. The 'Stuck Record' way of expressing yourself assertively 76
4. Contracting for a constructive discussion 79 - 87
5. The 'Time Out' technique to keep discussions on track 84
6. 'Uninterrupted Speaking Time' - hear and be heard 85 - 86
7. Spotting and stopping the 'game' of Uproar 95 - 96
8. The 'Not Now' method of controlling angry words 142

Manage your expectations

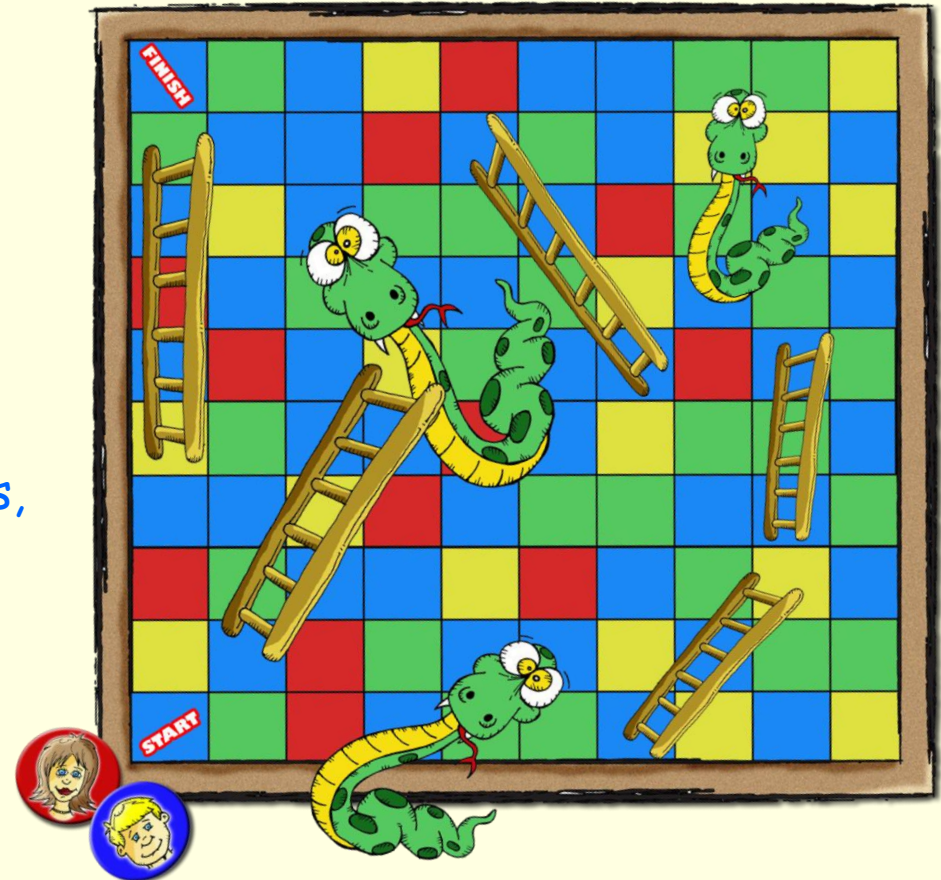


- It's important to realise at the outset that you are bound to have setbacks, old unhelpful behaviour re-occurring.
- Most couples working on their relationship are trying to change ways of being with each other which have become habitual. It's unrealistic to expect total consistency in new ways until the new ways have become new habits.
- In fact, progress can be measured by monitoring the setbacks:
 - Is the number of setbacks becoming more spaced out?
 - Are the setbacks less severe?
 - Are you able to get 'back on track' more quickly than before?

Expect setbacks: don't let them derail your attempts to change the way you relate.

Don't turn setbacks into failure

The methods in this book are highly effective in improving relationships and helping solve relationship problems. However, relationship improvement is, in some ways, like the game of snakes and ladders! Sometimes, because you and your partner are human and therefore fallible, you will get it wrong and replay old, damaging, behaviour.



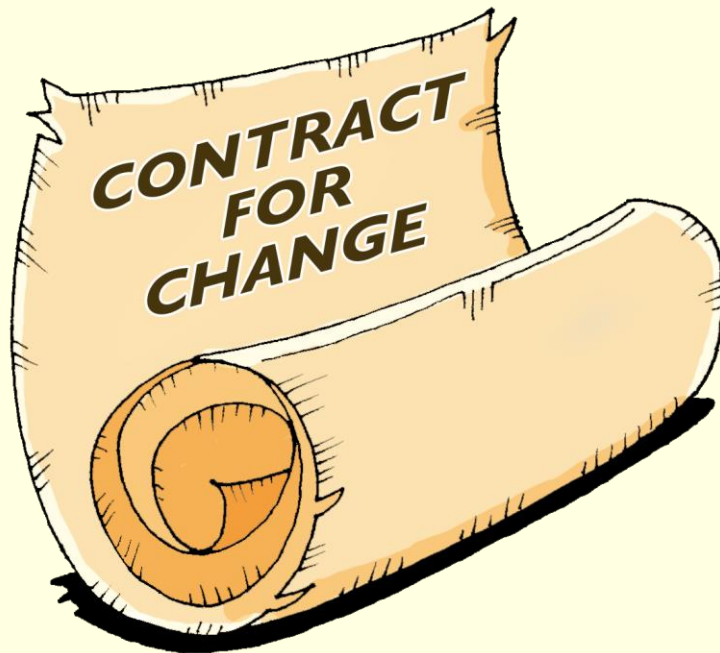
When you get it wrong, it's vital to remember that setbacks are not failure and get back on track.

This book is about action, about deciding how to change the way you think, feel and behave in your relationship.

- As has been said so often, if you do what you have usually done, you'll get what you have usually got!
- Just reading this book without pausing and practicing the advice offered, would be like you and your partner trying to learn to dance together by just reading a book about dancing.
- The longest journey starts with a single step - so does changing the way your relationship is! I wonder what way of behaving, thinking and feeling you will choose to change first?



No 'contract' for change - no change!

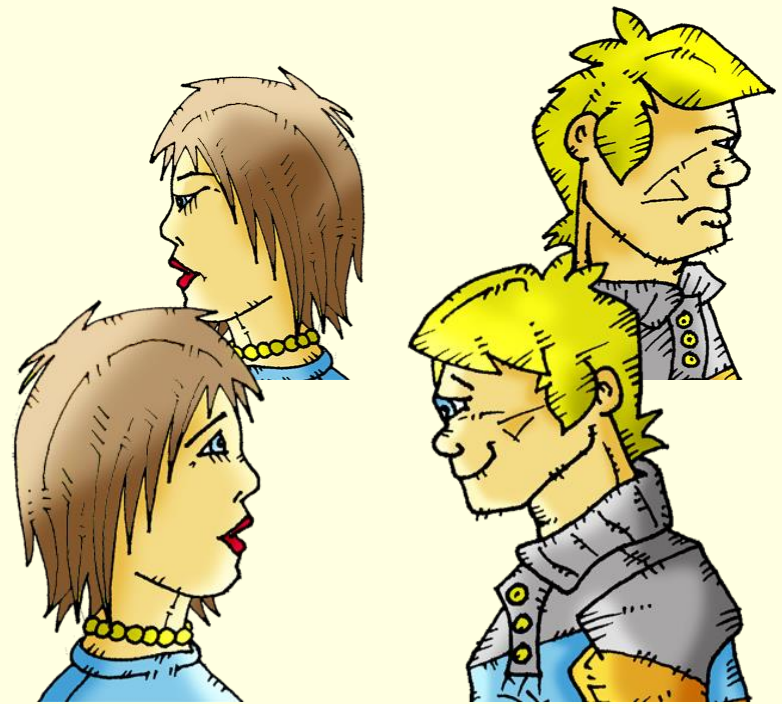


If you want someone to change, it's vital to first get their clear commitment to the specific changes needed, without which their attempts to change will fail.

And watch out for the word 'try' - it's leaving the door in their mind open to failure before they even start!

The 'contract' doesn't need to be in writing, but a clear verbal commitment about the changes to be made is the minimum needed to have any chance of success.

Couples
Counselling -
the most effective
way of improving
relationships



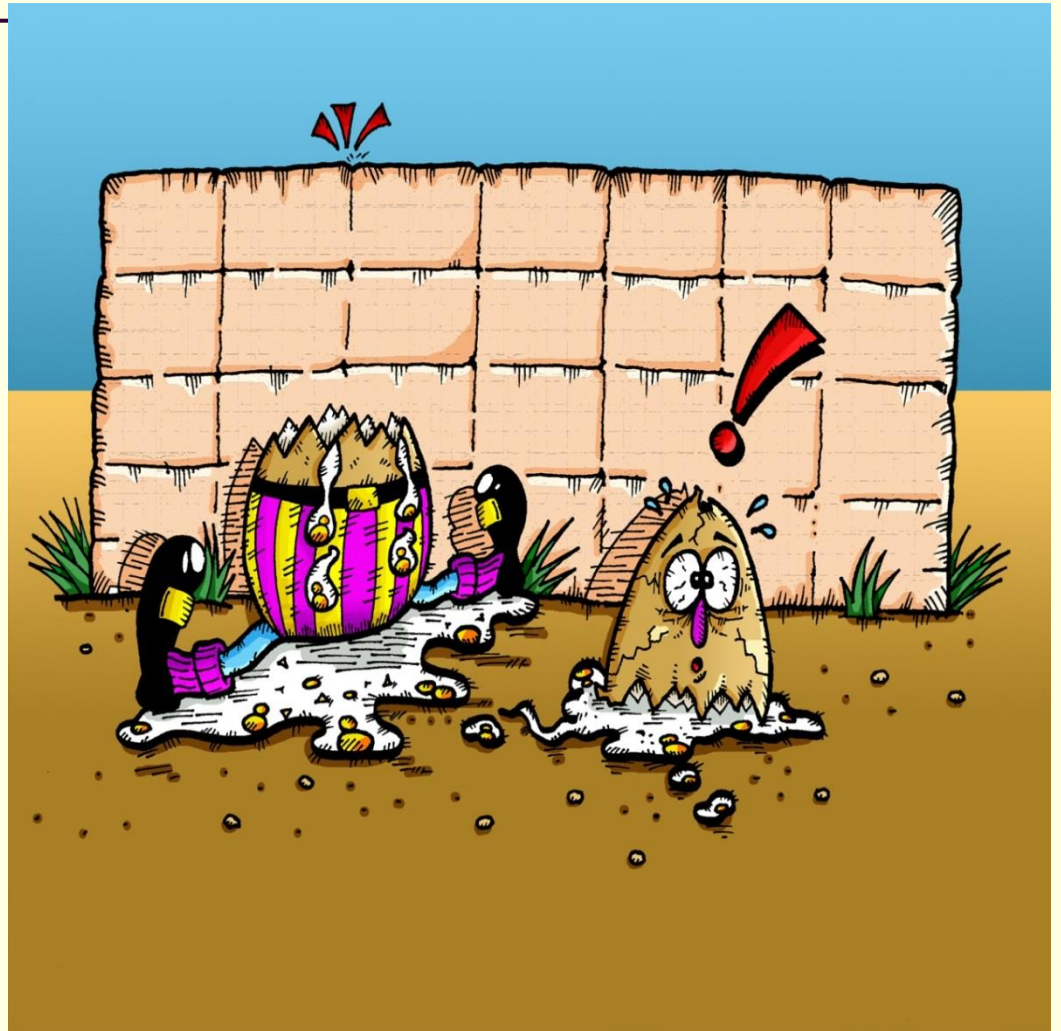
Some things you just can't solve on your own! If you can't discuss things in a constructive way [pages 79 - 87] you should seriously consider getting professional help soon.



Couples in conflict should act sooner rather than later

Don't leave it too long before deciding if you need professional help! I find that couples often leave it until they have built up such a history of bad feelings that it is very difficult to repair the relationship.

Remember Humpty Dumpty! He should have got off the wall before he fell!

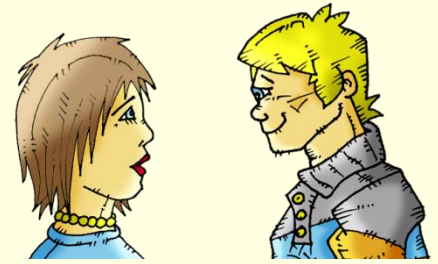


You should talk seriously about couples counselling



- Often, when couples come to see me, they are not both sure that they want the relationship to continue. They have come to counselling to try to overcome their difficulties so that, when the fog of conflict is cleared, each can make a decision knowing 'We have done the work. This may be the best it's going to be. Do we want to stay together?'
- In coming into counselling they have made the decision to work at overcoming their difficulties. **Have you?**
- If you hang back because of anger, hurt, resentment, fear of embarrassment, or because you are waiting for your partner to fix things, you are stuck in the swamp of indecision.

The potential benefits of couples counselling



- Resolution of issues which have been damaging the relationship
- Learn to discuss things calmly instead of arguing
- Anger and hurt reduction: both parties get to feel heard by the other
- Identify and let go of destructive behaviours and ways of thinking
- Improve communication skills, especially listening skills
- Improve anger management skills
- Understand each other better and why you both react the way you do
- Learn to put the past in the past and move on
- Draw up a pact, an agreement about future behaviour

Each counsellor is unique and choosing a counsellor is one of the most important decisions you will ever make! To read more about choosing a counsellor please visit www.brianamartin.co.uk

Getting your partner to couples counselling or personal therapy

- If you have tried persuasion and failed, and can't get agreement to a 'Constructive Discussion' [pages 79 - 87], you could write a letter to your partner explaining why you want to go to counselling [it's harder to ignore a letter than a conversation].
- **Caution!** I really don't like texts and e-mails for this kind of message. They are too easily transmitted when half thought-through while your emotions are aroused and you are in no state to use diplomatic wording. Also, it's too easy for your partner to answer off the cuff, without thinking it through. Maybe draft your message and think it over !?
- If nothing else works you may have to consider an ultimatum - counselling or else! This is risky to do and risky not to do! It would be a pity to finish up splitting because you didn't act decisively before it was too late.



Why your partner may be unable to admit their contribution to the problem

There are many reasons why someone may refuse, or be unable, to admit that it's their fault too. Here are a few of the reasons which come up regularly in couples counselling:-

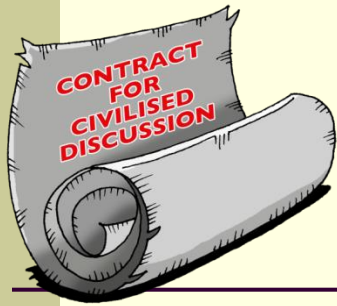
- They will not give their partner 'ammunition' to use against them.
- They believe that their behaviour is an irresistible response to their partner's behaviour. 'It's her fault, she is always winding me up!'
- They have subconsciously filtered the 'facts' and constructed a version of what happened that leaves them blameless [Pages 90 - 93].
- In their 'Big Book of Right Ways' they haven't done anything wrong.
- They are sheltering from the guilt they may feel if they admit to themselves that they are at least partly to blame.

Is this your partner, or you, or both of you?



Working together to change things

- Getting your partner to dip into this book should be very helpful but, if you suggest it, they may think that you have found stuff to beat them over the head with: that you wouldn't be asking them to look at the book if it didn't point the finger of blame at them.
- A typical reaction might be:-
'I'm not looking at it. Why should I? You're the problem, not me'.
- I suggest that, when you have identified some of the things which you have been doing which you need to change, you could say something like, 'I've been reading this book and can see how I've contributed to what's been going wrong. I'd like you to look at it too and then we can talk about how we can work together to change things'.



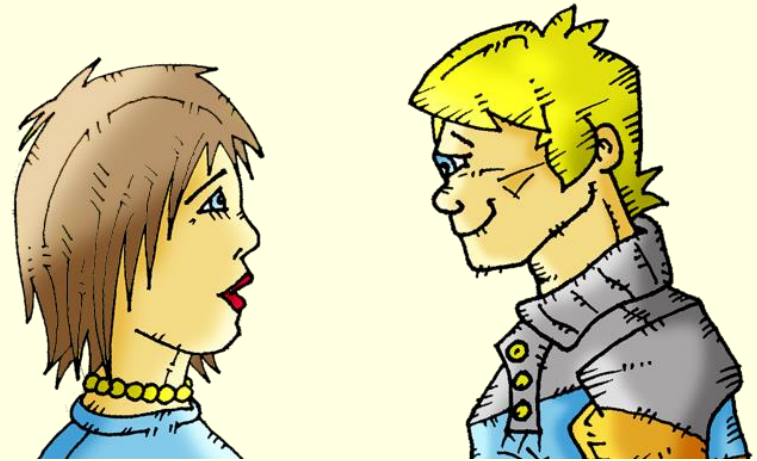
Getting your partner to accept their contribution to the problem

Some other options:

- Try for a 'Constructive Discussion' [pages 79 - 87] with the aim of getting your partner to look at this book.
- Write a letter about the problems as you see them and ask for suggestions on what to do about them. Take care to avoid attacking your partner. Say, 'I feel.... [hurt, sad, angry' etc.] NOT, 'You have hurt me' or 'You make me angry'. These are accusations and will lead to a counter attack.
- You can also use the above approaches to persuade your partner to go to couples counselling with you. A couples counsellor probably has a much better chance than you of getting your partner to see, accept and work on their contribution to the problems.

Developing the 'right attitude'

The right attitude
to each other and to
the relationship.



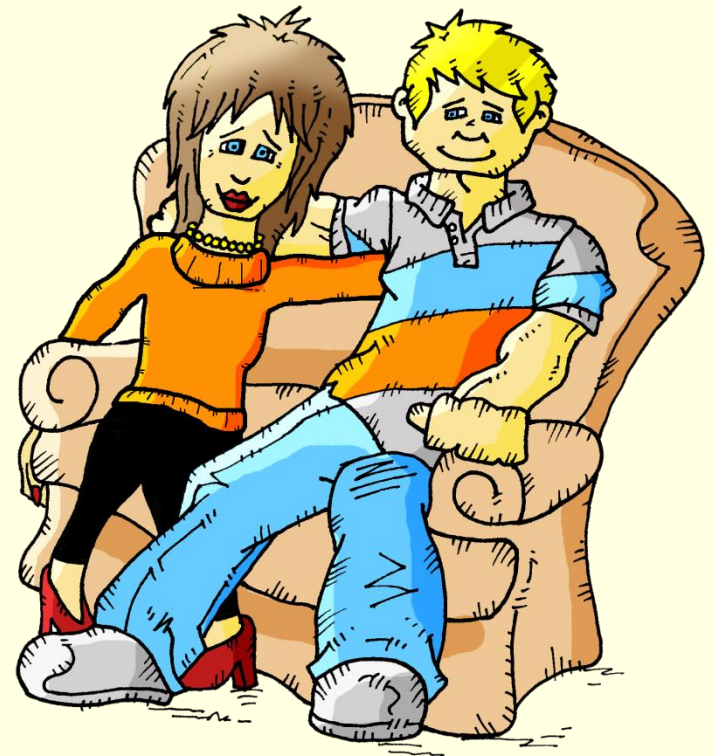
How to be loved, feel valued and be heard

.....If you want love, show love.

.....If you want to be valued by someone,
show that you value them.

.....If you want to be heard by someone,
listen, empathise, hear, them.

If you are angry or hurting it's very likely that you find it impossible to be like this with your partner right now, but this is the way forward if you want a good relationship. The need is to deal with any anger and hurt as a priority. See pages 159 - 166.



I work with couples to develop this 'right' attitude

1. 'I want to let go of past hurt and build a better relationship'.
2. 'I accept that I am part of the problem and I'm going to work on me too.'
3. 'I love you: you are an OK person. I want to be with, even though your behaviour has been and sometimes is, not OK'.
4. 'Even when I don't agree with you I want to understand how you are feeling and why you are feeling that way'.
5. 'I will be assertive in raising things for discussion and encourage you to do the same.'



So what's stopping you having the 'right attitude'

Are
you
stuck
in a
relationship
swamp?

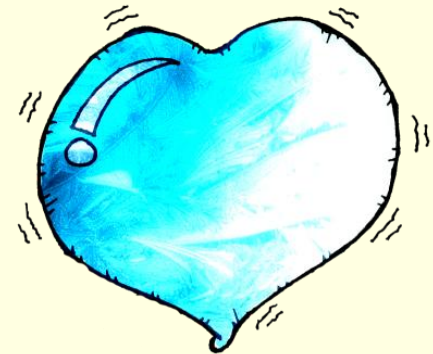


Angry and hurt? You may react 'No way can I switch on that 'right' attitude'

- When couples start their work with me, they usually arrive feeling angry and hurt. Sometimes the anger and hurt is in one direction, usually it's in both directions. Their negative attitude to each other and to the relationship, is stopping them moving forward.
- Unresolved anger and hurt is often a major factor in 'bedroom problems'.
- The fact that you are reading this book may mean that right now you are a long way from having the right attitude to heal your relationship because you feel angry and hurt.



Angry behaviour may be 'hot' or 'cold' or a mixture of both.



Angry feelings and behaviour may be 'hot' or 'cold' or a mixture of both.

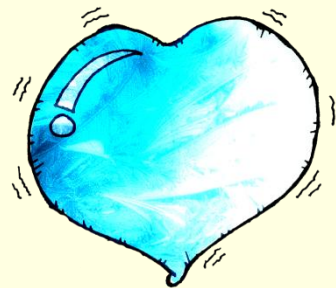
HOT ANGER

Aggressive, intimidating behaviour including verbally abusive rants.



COLD ANGER

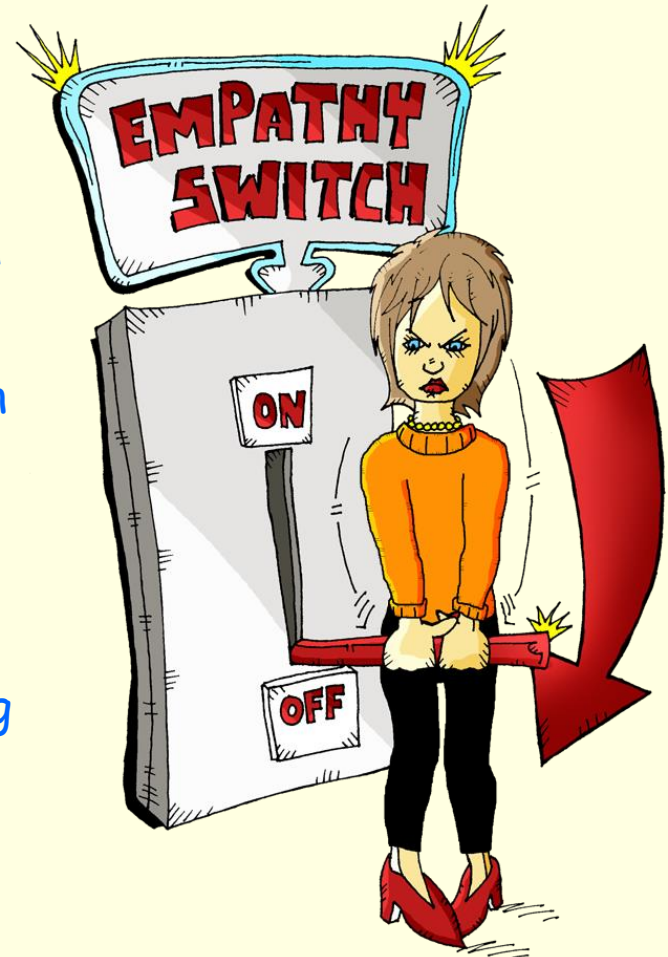
Pushing hurt and anger down inside. Fighting back in passive aggressive ways [pages 121 - 122], including being frosty without explaining why and disinterest in sex.



Or a mixture of both?

Odds are, unresolved anger and hurt is at the root of the problems

- If you are feeling angry and hurt, one thing is certain - your empathy switch is 'off', because that's what unresolved anger and hurt do - switch off our empathy switch and make us insensitive to the needs of the person we are angry with.
- This results in them feeling hurt and growing angry in return. A situation develops where both parties are being insensitive to the needs of the other.
- A 'hot' or 'cold' war develops, sexual activities cease and communication eventually breaks down.



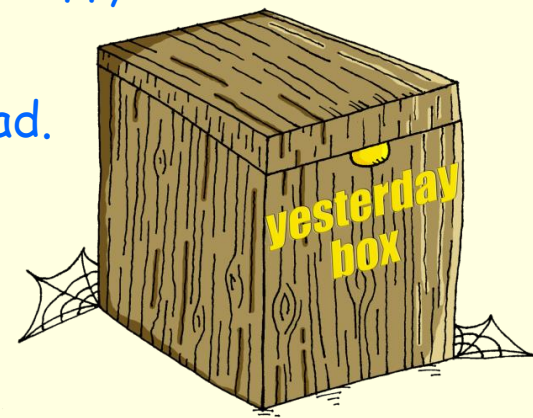
Emotional trading stamps - how we store anger and hurt

- When we store anger and hurt it's like collecting emotional trading stamps and cashing them in with 'over the top' reactions.
- Unresolved anger and hurt is a major factor in relationship failure and sexual problems.
- Anger stamps need to be released in ways that don't harm yourself or anyone else [pages 159 - 166].



Don't play the 'Archaeology' game - don't keep digging up the past

- One of the biggest blocks to couples moving forward is when they have not successfully worked through old issues. When they first start work with me, they are often preoccupied with past hurt and want to keep digging up the past, stuck in a blaming loop.
- Until they have buried past issues they can't move on. The door to the future will not open until the door to the past is closed.
- If you and your partner are stuck in replaying past stuff, you may need professional help in opening the door to the future - help in putting a new show on the road.



Will you throw away the future reaching back into the past?

Will you throw away the future reaching back into the past?
Living is so much harder when we lose each today in re-living past pain.
The bottle of life is no longer full, perhaps it never was,
But seeing that it's half full rather than half empty,
Can transform the way you feel,
Can transform the way your life is heading.

Decide to put aside yesterday, with its mistakes, regrets and pain.
Choose to live in today, in each moment.
You can survive one day at a time,
You can recover one day at a time,
You can build and rebuild one day at a time.

Every new day is the beginning of the rest of your life,
Will you throw it away reliving yesterday ?

Brian A Martin

Drawing a line on the past

You don't have to forgive your partner for what's happened to be able to move forward!

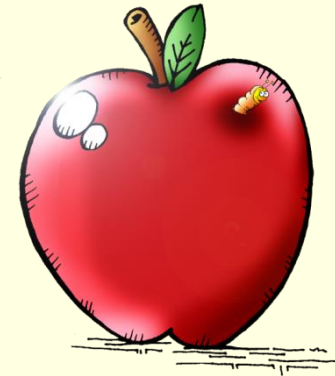
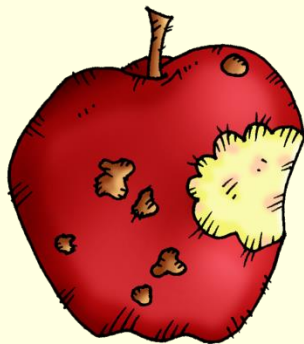
- Forgiveness is best, if you can, but most people initially find it impossible to forgive.
- I help them to move towards acceptance, rather than forgiveness, 'what happened can't be changed and I am not going to throw away the future because of it'.
- Relationships can and do heal when couples decide to accept what's happened, 'draw a line', put the past in the past.



Stepping Stones to the 'right' attitude

It will be a massive help if you can accept that your partner is an OK person who behaves badly at times, not a bad person.

Is your partner a good person who behaves badly at times or a bad person? A 'bad apple'?

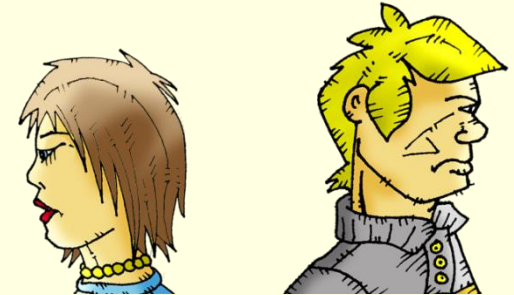


Maybe your partner is 'not perfect, but good enough'? A 'good apple' but flawed?

Falling out over two versions of the truth

When positive communication about an issue has broken down each party has their own version of events leading to the disagreement. The different versions each justify their own behaviour. They have both filtered the meaning of events [90 - 93] to support their version; both believe their version of what happened is correct.

- They each have their own version of the truth.
- Without knowing it, they have each filtered the meaning of events to support their version.
- When their version is challenged they defend it because they believe it.
- If blamed or attacked they fight back.



It's almost unbelievable sometimes, how different the two versions are: it's as though the parties are talking about different events.

If your partner feels deeply hurt by something you have done.....

- To be able to move forward you need to understand and convince your partner that you understand, truly understand and deeply regret, the hurt experienced.
- Don't defend or attempt to justify what you did. If you have your own issues in mitigation they should be separately discussed much later. Your partner will not hear you until feeling heard by you.
- Multiple, sincere, heartfelt apologies are a good start, but only a start. Be prepared to discuss repeatedly what happened and experience your partner's hurt and anger without retaliating.

Words alone won't do it! Let your empathy and regret be deep and beyond doubt.



You will need to be very patient with the person you hurt

- I find that the perpetrator of the hurt often feels that they have done enough to mend things, but the hurt person is far from ready to let things go and move forward.
- I had one client who nursed her hurt and screwed up her relationship with passive aggressive retaliation, for 35 years.
- Her partner had apologised for something which happened when they were first married, but 'He has never convinced me that he understands how much I was hurt'.



Managing your reactions

'The Anger Management Programme' is designed to help control reactions when faced with anger provoking or hurtful situations. It's about being able to choose what to do instead of reacting aggressively and angrily.

Key extracts from the programme are included on pages 147 - 166.

The 'Not Now' impulse control technique is on page 142.



www.angermanagementprogramme.co.uk

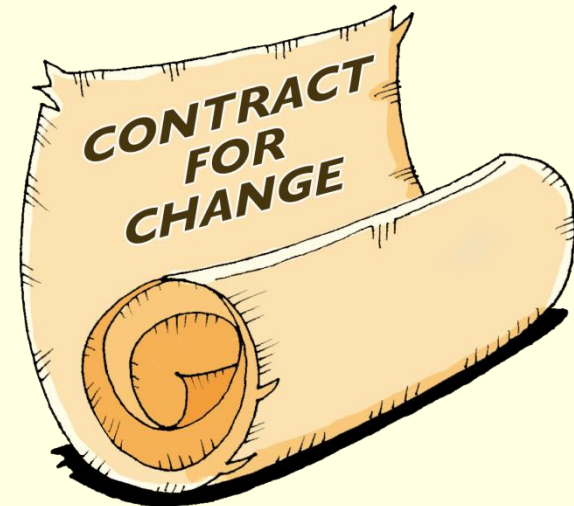
Changing
your partner's
behaviour by
changing your
behaviour



Are you heaping all the blame on your partner?

When couples initially start work with me they tend to be blaming each other and discounting their own contribution to the problems. I have separate individual sessions with each partner at which I ask about their contribution to the problems. I ask.....

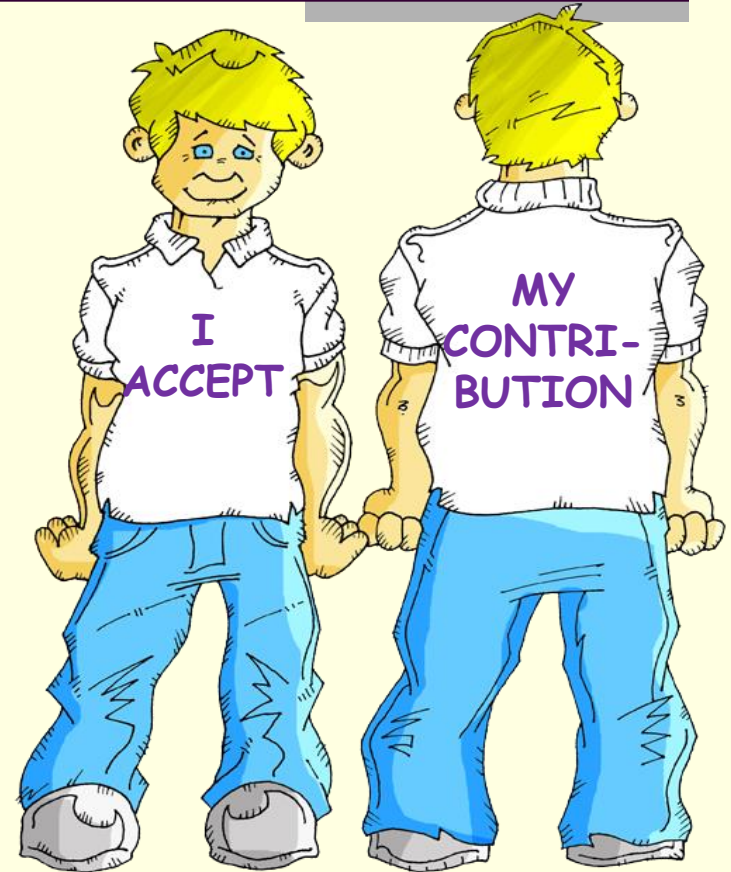
1. 'Are the problems 100% your partner's fault?'
[only once have I had someone insist that it was 100% their partner's fault].
2. Next question, 'So what's your contribution?'
3. Next question, 'Is it OK if we talk about your contribution too?'



To break the conflict cycle you need to take responsibility for your contribution

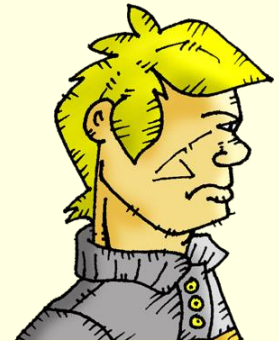
In all my time working with couples, and as a mediator between neighbours in conflict, I have never, repeat never, found that all the fault lies with one party.

You need to accept that, however the problems started, you are almost certainly contributing to the present difficulties. You should decide what you are prepared to do differently to help improve the relationship.



How hard are YOU trying?

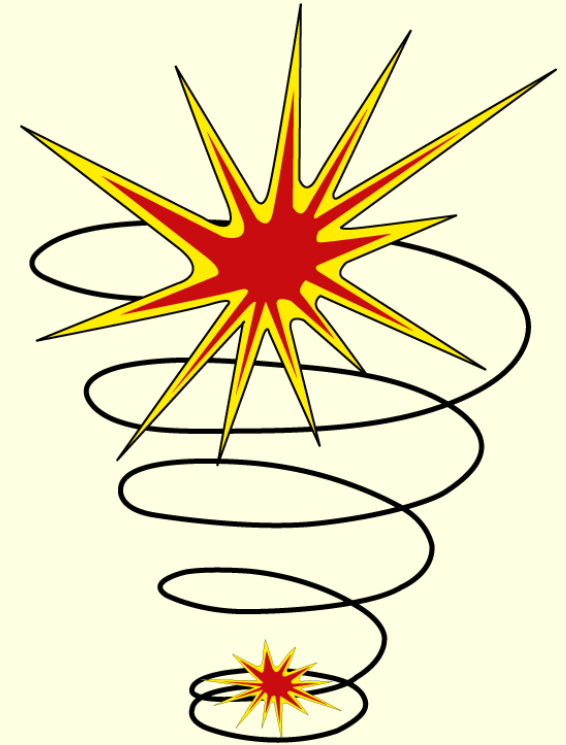
- I know that what follows may be a very hard message if you have been, or are being, hurt by your partner, but the fact is that you, to some degree, are almost certainly inviting some of what's going wrong in the relationship.
- You may not have started the problems, but it's almost inevitable that you are now part of the on-going relationship difficulties.
- **How can I say this with such certainty when I don't even know you?**
- Because us human beings retaliate, in some way or other, when we are hurt or angry with someone. We feel less than loving, less than empathic, more critical and become openly aggressive, or passive aggressive [pages 121 - 122].



Breaking the destructive loop

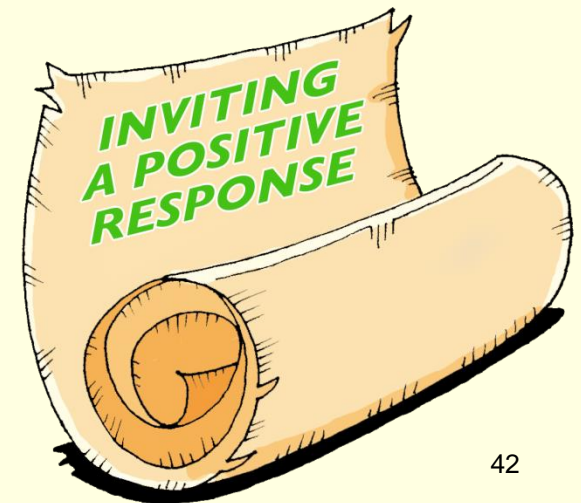
- Hurt and anger leads to destructive behaviour, which leads to destructive behaviour in response, which leads to a spiral of further destructive behaviours.
- It's like a slow motion version of the psychological game of Uproar [pages 95 - 96].
- The spiral needs to be interrupted - a halt called to the game! One of you needs to take the lead in initiating a break in the cycle.

Why not you?



Invite a positive response

- When you change positively the way you are with your partner, it opens the door to positive behaviour change towards you.
- Maybe you have been really hurt by your partner, so it's very hard to for you to accept that you need to take a share of the responsibility for the way the relationship now is.
- But I know, from my work with relationships in trouble, that destructive behaviours are never all on one side. The repair work is never all in the hands of one partner.
- So I invite you to consider what you are doing to invite the behaviour you are getting.



Identify your contribution

After the introductory meeting, I see the partners separately to give each of them a chance to vent, let it all hang out, without the risk that their partner will get angry and withdraw from counselling before it's even started. I ask four questions:

Question One: What's wrong with the relationship?

Response: Lots of criticism of partner.

Question Two: What will your partner say when I ask them the same question?

Response: Confused and much shorter.

Question Three: What do YOU need to do differently to help get this relationship on track?

Response: Often an initial stunned silence, then at most two or three ideas.

Question Four: What's good about the relationship

Response: Varies from 'Lots' to 'Not much'.

Don't be abusive or tolerate abuse



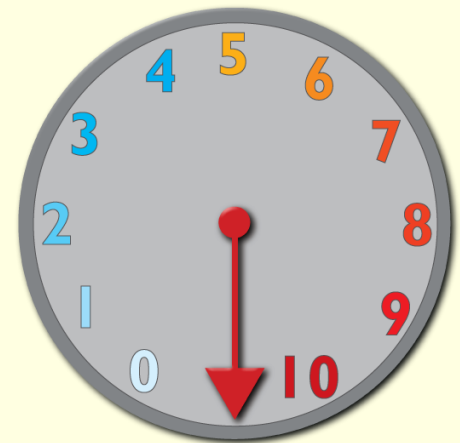
Biting chunks out of someone we want to care about is not the most sensible thing to do, is it? And, as you are only too well aware, insults come back to haunt us - we have long memories! Insults are like toothpaste - once toothpaste is out of the tube it can't be got back in!

Don't insult your partner, even if they insult you. Focus on their behaviour, not on their character.



Don't let 'annoying habits' get you

- Your partner, like me and you, probably has some annoying habits? If so, you won't change them by nagging. Unless the habits are seriously unhygienic or unsafe, learn to accept them as minor imperfections in an otherwise OK person.
- Annoying habits don't have magic power to 'get to us' on their own. We give them their power!
- List any annoying habits your partner has: rate each of them on a scale of 0 -10. How important are they really?



Expect the annoying habit to happen and be pleased when it doesn't, instead of hoping it won't happen and being irritated when it does.

Withdrawing the permissions to be critical you have given yourself

1. Make a list of situations where you have, in the past, given yourself Permission to be critical of, or angry with, your partner.
2. Cross out those Permissions which you decide to keep.
3. Head up the list of remaining items, the ones you have decided to withdraw, 'I withdraw my permission to be critical and get angry with my partner when they
4. Invite your partner to do the same.



If you feel you must criticise.....

- If you do find it appropriate to criticise occasionally, don't criticise the person that your partner is, criticise the behaviour.
- For example - don't say 'You are a rotten b"*# \$+%' say, 'Your behaviour is "*# \$+%'
- **This is an important parenting point too!** Don't tell a child 'You are naughty'. Say 'What you did was naughty'.



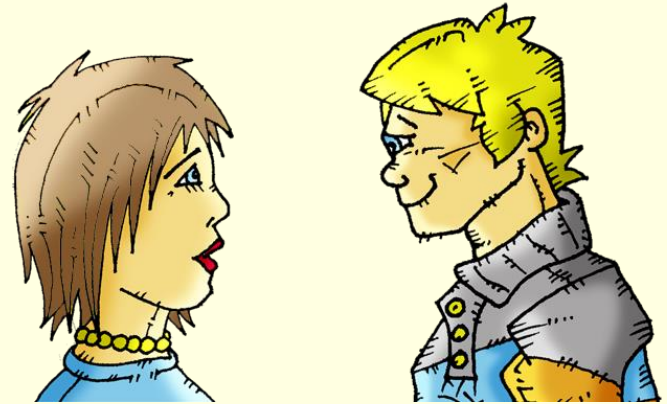
Instead of criticising what you don't want stroke the behaviour you do want

- Try to 'catch your partner doing things right' and say how much you appreciate it, instead of only noticing when they 'get it wrong'.
- 'I noticed you stopped putting your dirty socks in the bread bin. Thank you!'
- And when they do one of those around the house jobs you have asked to be done, make sure you notice [and say so].



Developing your empathy skills

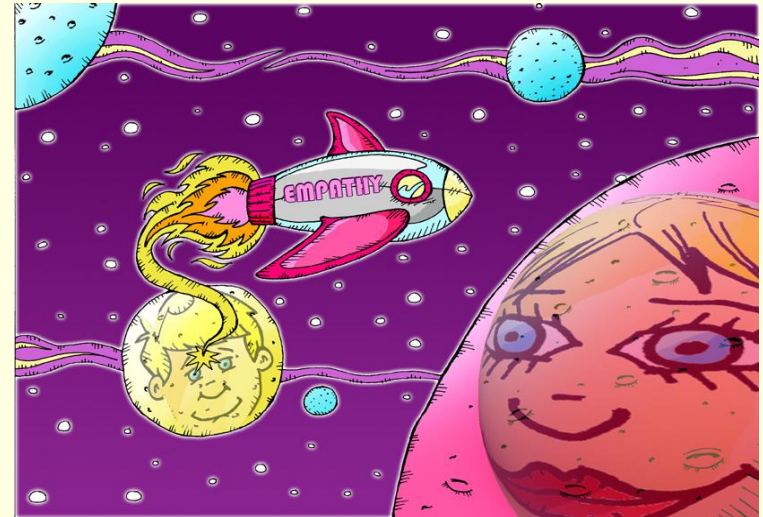
Without empathy
there can't be a
good relationship



Listening skills
are at the heart
of empathy skills

Defining empathy

- The biggest misunderstanding about empathy is that to be empathic means that you have to agree with the way the other person is thinking, feeling and behaving. This not true.
- Empathy does not mean you have to agree - it's about understanding the other person's perspective, not necessarily agreeing with it.
- Empathy is 'putting yourself in the other person's shoes and trying to understand things from their point of view even when you find it impossible to agree.



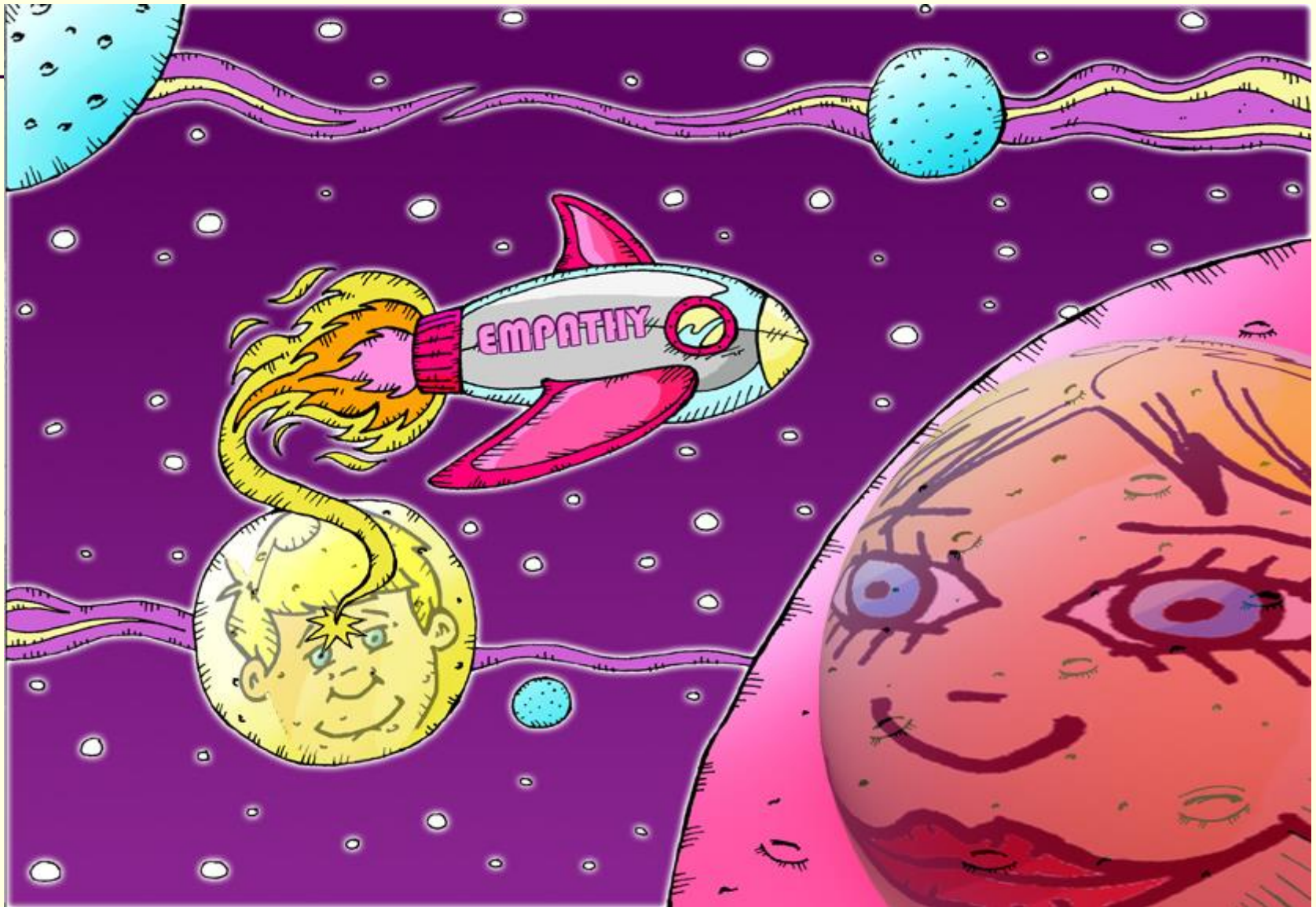
Empathy involves trying to get inside the other person's head, entering their internal world for a while and seeing things as they see them.

Empathy is how we travel between our world and the other person's world

- As you know, we are often 'not on the same planet' as our partner.
- We each have our own way of looking at some things and often experience things differently.
- To understand things from another person's perspective you have to journey to the inside of their head on the 'Empathy Space Probe'.



The Empathy Space Probe



The biggest need of someone who is angry and upset is - to feel heard.

If our first reaction to someone's anger and hurt is to argue back, explain, justify, or not have time to listen, they are likely to get madder and madder. Their need is for us is to understand and acknowledge their anger and hurt before we try to get our point across.

I asked one client what she did in response to her partner's angry 'performances'. She assured me that she didn't do anything to wind him up. 'I don't say anything. When he's in a tantrum, I just look at him as though he's barmie'. She was surprised to learn how anger provoking her 'I'm not listening' response was.



It's vital to demonstrate that you understand

I don't agree with her, but how can I show her I understand?

- Until someone who is angry or hurt feels heard, they are deaf to reason.
If you want to calm the other person and get your own point across, you are not only going to have to listen carefully, but also show that you heard, really heard, and understand how they are feeling.
- This can be achieved by playing back to the person what they have told you.
'So you are angry because I.....'
'You are feeling hurt because I.....'
- To read more about listening skills visit <http://selfhelp.brianamartin.co.uk>



Demonstrating that you understand how the other person feels is an essential and often overlooked aspect of good listening.

Perhaps you are a good listener already?



Tick those statements where you can be confident that 'Yes' is you.

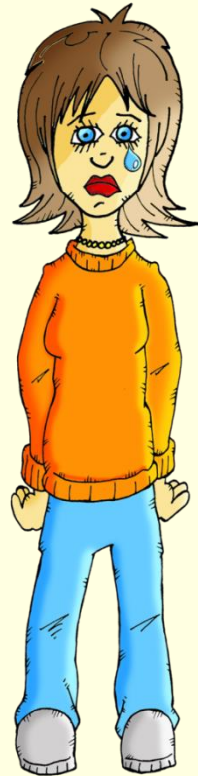
1. I am good at giving undivided attention when my partner is talking
2. I don't decide what to say until my partner has finished speaking
3. I ask my partner to tell me how they are feeling and why
4. I don't interrupt with well intentioned reassurance or comments
5. I ask follow-up questions to encourage my partner to continue talking
6. When my partner expresses different views to mine,
I try to understand how he/she got to think differently to me
7. I share my understanding of my partner's perspective with him/her
8. My partner they would say that I am a good listener

When listening, remember how we substitute anger for hurt

- Anger is very often the emotion we unconsciously substitute when we are hurt, jealous, feeling anxious, frustrated or resentful.
- Often hurt is the authentic emotion, the 'real' emotion but, instead of feeling sad, we feel angry.
- Sometimes it works the other way round. Some people who 'don't do anger' cry when the authentic underlying emotion is anger.
- It can be very helpful to think about what hurt may be underlying the anger of your partner towards you [or your own anger] . Then you can respond more appropriately by focusing on healing the hurt.

Look for the feeling behind the anger and respond to that - not the anger

Hurt Feelings



Transformed
to anger

Empathy and listening skills development starts with the right attitude

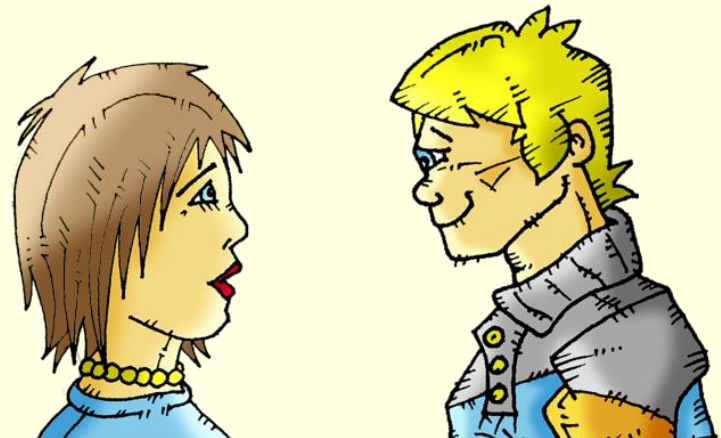
An empathic attitude.....

'Even though I may never see what happened the way you do, I want to understand your perspective - understand what you are thinking, how you are feeling and why you reacted in the way you did'

An empathy seeking attitude will also be evident in your tone!

Listen to yourself. Do you sound as though you want to understand? Or is there anger, frustration, criticism in your voice?

Occasionally, I have said to couples, 'You say you love each other, but there is no love in the way you talk to each other'. When they soften their tone the atmosphere in the therapy room changes too!



Understanding your partner's point of view

.....when alone, become them for a while.

All you need is another chair, an interest in understanding your partners point of view and the place to yourself.

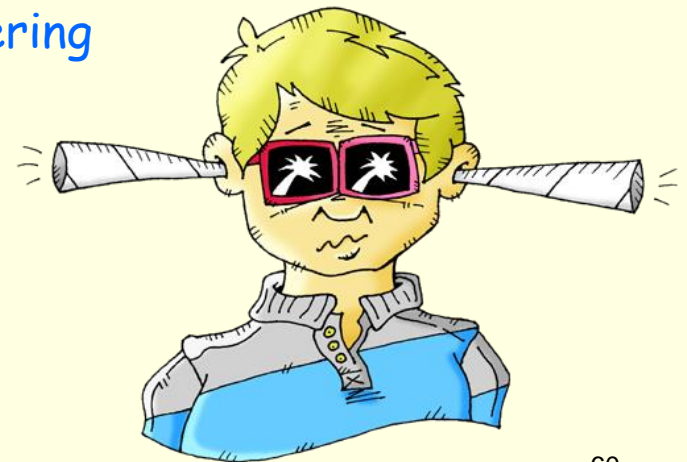
- Sit in the other chair and become your partner for a while.
- Explain things out loud, as you think they might have experienced them.
- When you return to your chair, spend a little time thinking what they need from you based on what you have heard yourself say.
- If you realise that your behaviour has been unhelpful, decide what, if anything, you are going to do about it.



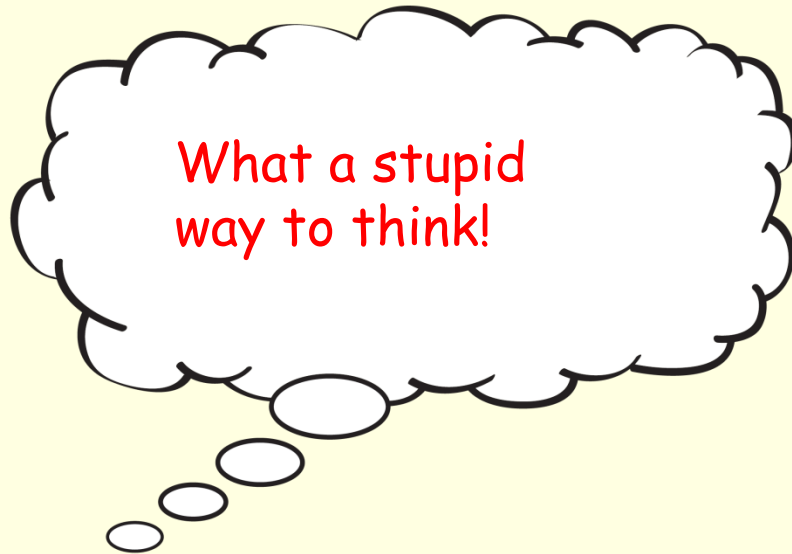
Suspend
scepticism -
try it.
You may be
surprised how
much two chair
work can change
perspectives by
giving you
empathic insight

Their information and yours is always incomplete and different in some ways

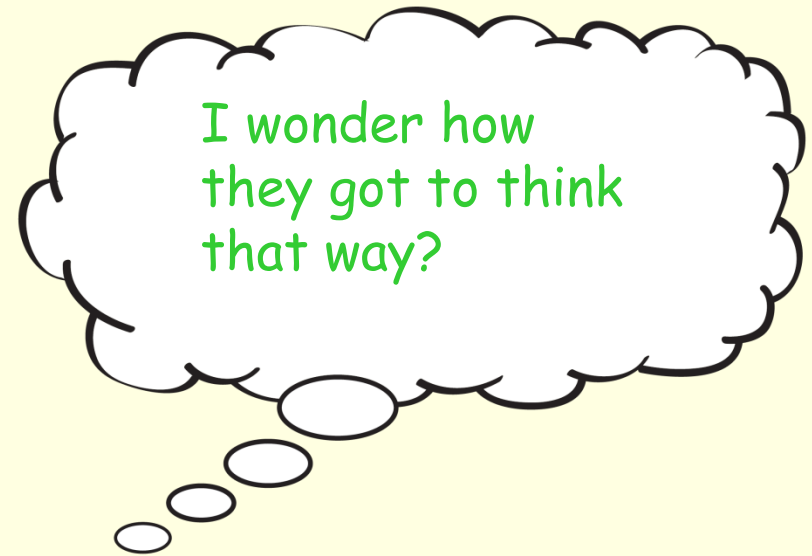
- When you can't understand someone's point of view, remember, there is always an information gap between you.
- Ask yourself:
 - 'How did they get to think that way?'
 - 'What might they be taking into account that I don't know?'
 - 'What am I taking into account that they might not know?'
- Two people arguing are never both considering the same 'facts', because 'facts' are often an opinion, an opinion based on filtered and biased recollection of incomplete information. [pages 90 - 93]



What are they taking into account that you aren't? Or you taking into account they aren't?



JUDGEMENTAL

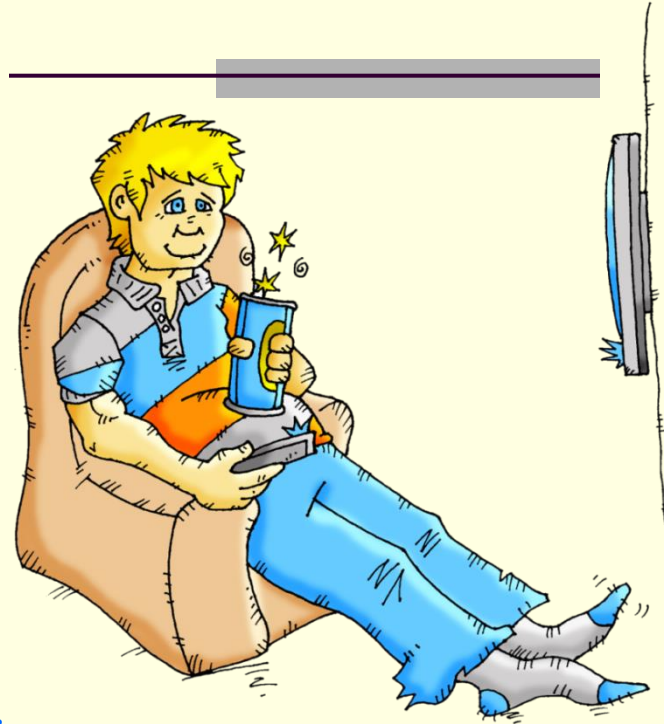


EMPATHIC

The right attitude is key to effective listening - wanting to understand.

Don't let your partner not listen

- Be assertive [pages 65 - 78].
- Don't carry on talking when it's obvious that your partner isn't listening.
- Confront auto-nod and auto-grunt behaviour by stopping talking in mid-sentence and holding silence until your partners asks 'What's the matter'.
- Stop talking if your partner is not totally focussed on your every word. Ask for and get, their full attention before continuing.



Unless it's unsafe, stay in the room with your angry partner

- Take care before deciding to walk out of the room when your partner is angry.
- When someone is angry their need is to feel heard. Leaving the room without an agreed 'Time Out' [page 84] will increase their frustration level and may provoke extreme behaviour.
- Use listening skills to convince your partner that you are hearing and trying to understand.



You can't listen and compose your response at the same time!

- A big block to effective listening is thinking about your response while your partner is still talking.
- Thinking that you will forget something you want to say in response may be a big problem too.
- If these are problems for you, have a pen and paper handy and jot down bullet points to remind you what to come back to.
- Try to understand the way they are feeling by asking follow-up questions if necessary.
- Think about your response only when you are clear why your partner is feeling the way they do.

Yes, but.....



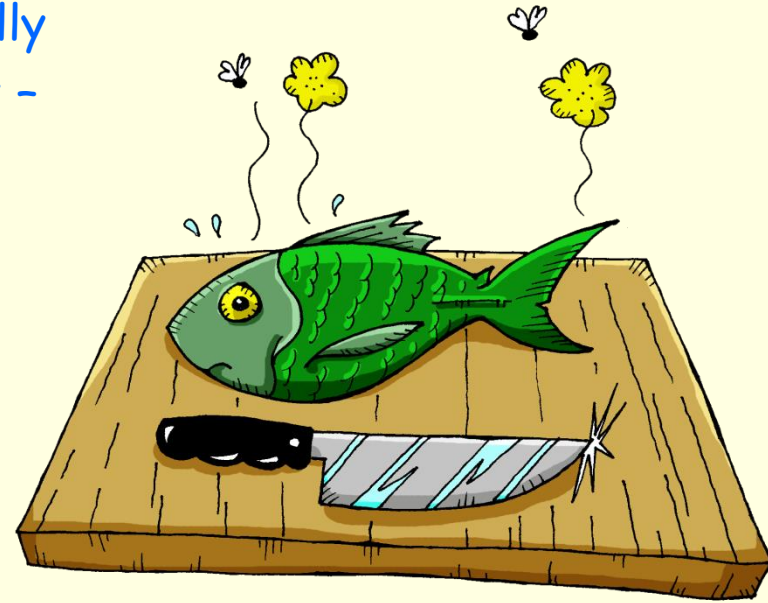
Developing your assertiveness is essential - because passivity is a relationship threat



In working with couples,
I find that a root cause
of their problems can
often be passivity,
a lack of assertiveness,
by either or both
partners.

Why passivity can be a recipe for relationship breakdown

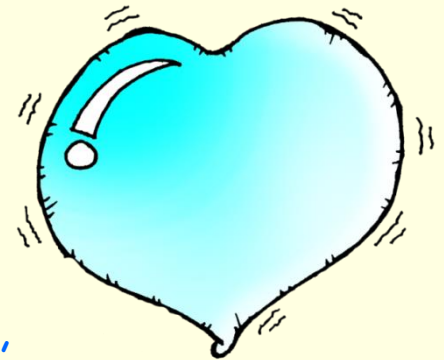
- Assertive and aggressive types are usually open about what they are unhappy about - the 'smelly fish', the problem, is on the table - not under it, out of sight.
- In contrast, passive partners tend to bottle up their issues because they don't know how to process them assertively. Problems fester, which often results in passive aggressive behaviour [pages 121 - 122], punctuated occasionally by 'over the top' explosions.
- Sometimes, however, the bottled-up anger simply results in the shutting down of loving feelings.



Assertiveness is often best, but it's also important to be able to let your anger show when justified [and safe!]

Passivity can result in the slow death of a relationship

- A passive person in a relationship will tend to be dominated by their partner. The passive partner does not strongly express the dissatisfaction they may have with the relationship, or gives up when they repeatedly fail to get a resolution of the issues.
- Issues not put to rest accumulate as a collection of internal anger and hurt stamps [page 28] which act as a coolant on the relationship.
- The coolant effect of the anger and hurt stamps can eventually lead to a numbing out, a shutting down, of loving feelings by the passive partner.
- Unresolved anger and hurt can be like putting your hand in a bucket of ice cold water! After a while, the pain is replaced by numbness. The difference is, in relationship it's your heart, not your hand!



Lost that loving feeling? Unexpressed issues may be the cause

- Often the passive person who has lost that loving feeling can't explain why they have fallen out of love. They only know that they don't feel for their partner the way they used to.
- In therapy, the passive person who has shut down can be surprised to discover that the problem is accumulated anger and hurt.
- They may say 'But I don't 'do' anger', to which my reply is 'that may be the problem'

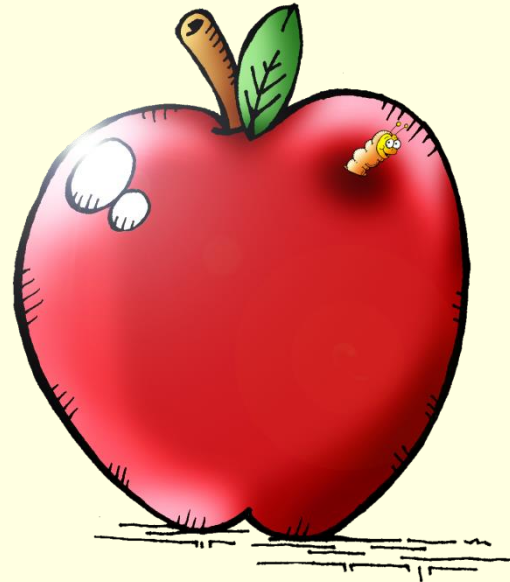


If you think that you have lost that loving feeling,
don't despair - it may only be in the fridge.
Start talking [pages 79 - 87] or get professional help.

Maybe your partner is not as flawless as you thought they were

Maybe it's turned out that your partner is not as flawless as you thought they were when you first got together, but perhaps they are still worthy of your love? **Not perfect, but good enough?**

It would be good to try to get the issues sorted ASAP, before they freeze the relationship to death.



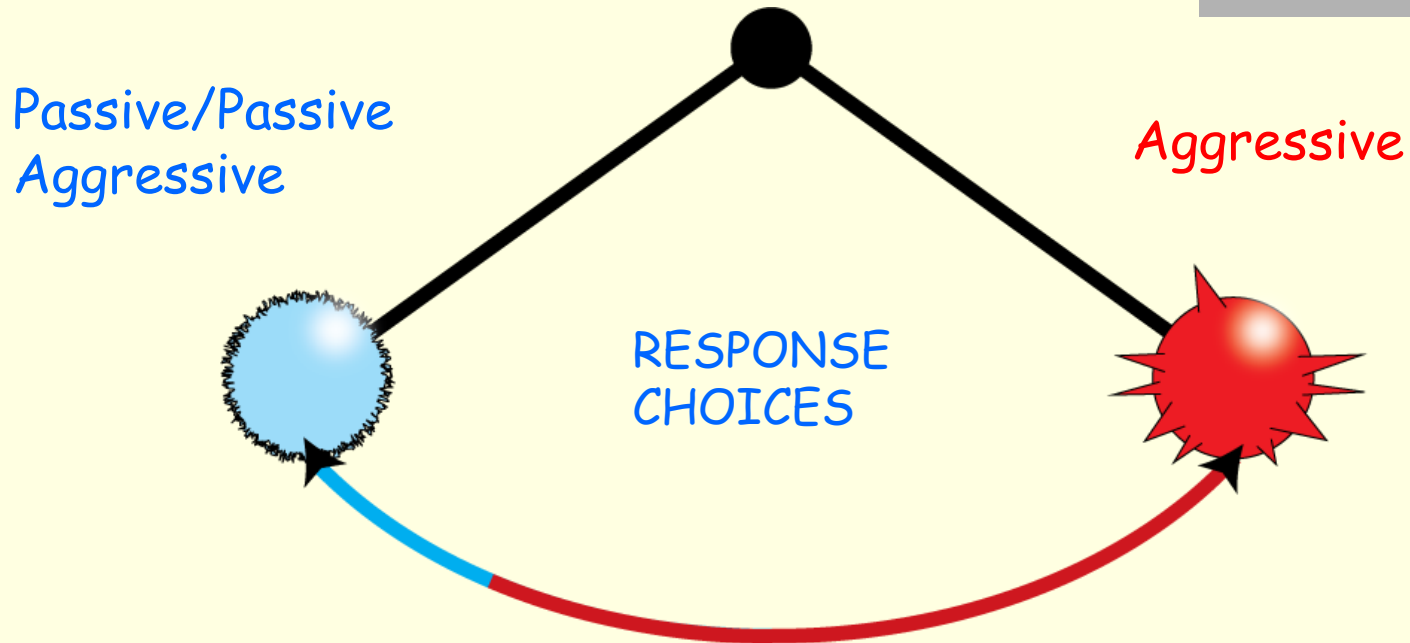
Passivity and the problems it causes

What happens when someone who is a passive type feels angry?

- Lack of assertiveness means that there are only two choices about how to deal with issues - either passive/passive aggressively or aggressively.
- Passive aggressive behaviour [pages 121 - 122] is often stubborn, rebellious or deliberately hurtful. The behaviour may range from deliberately doing things to 'wind up' the other person, including withholding affection and refusing to discuss what is upsetting them. Passive aggression is very damaging to relationships: it does nothing to solve problems and makes matters worse.



The Passive to Aggressive Pendulum

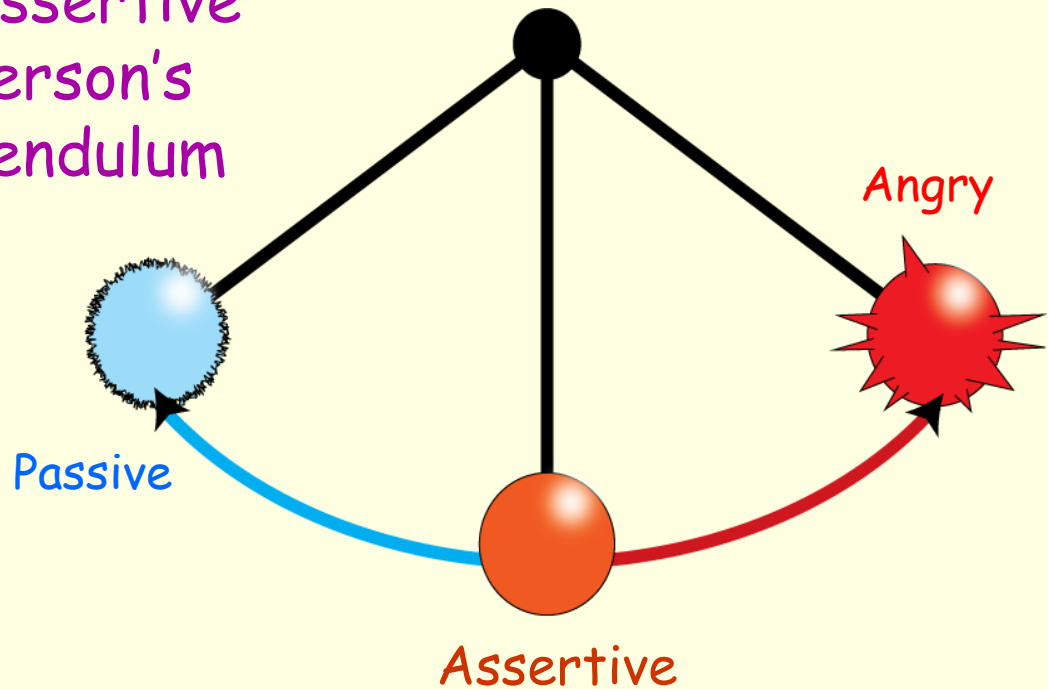


Passive people are often nursing deep unexpressed anger which they keep bottled up. Occasionally something will 'push them over the edge', which results in a rage and amazes their family, friends or colleagues at work, who are seeing an aspect of the person which seems totally out of character.

Couples need to learn to discuss issues assertively and without anger

It's your assertive right to also be passive sometimes, even angry when appropriate.

Assertive person's pendulum

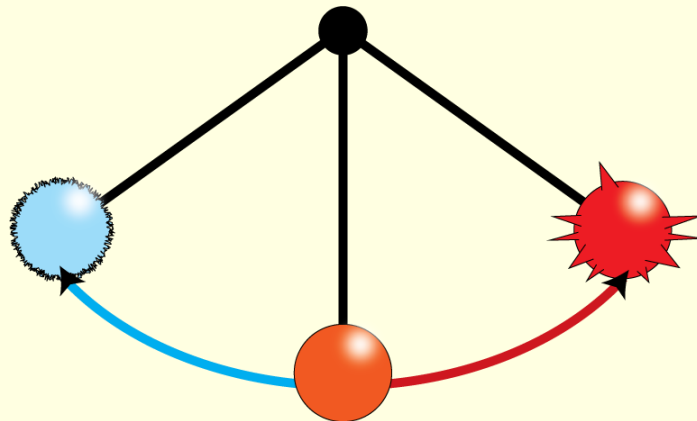


Notice that when you are assertive you don't need to be passive aggressive. Assertiveness also means you can CHOOSE an appropriate response, passive, assertive or angry, depending on the situation.

A definition of assertiveness

Assertiveness is:-

- Saying how you feel and what you think, in a non-aggressive way.
- Asking simply and clearly for what you want.
- Knowing what you want so you can ask for it.
- Enquiring when you are not sure what someone is thinking or feeling.
- Checking out what was meant before reacting.



Once you have learned how to be assertive, you're no longer stuck with the extremes of passive or aggressive responding.

How to be assertive [when it's safe to be open]

- Know What you want so you can ask for it
- Ask Simply and clearly for what you want
- Say How you feel and what you think in a firm but courteous way
- Say 'No' To what you don't want
- Stay calm Don't attack or blame
- Keep The focus on yourself - start sentences with 'I' not 'You'.
- Enquire When you are not sure what someone is thinking or feeling
- Check out What was meant before reacting



Assertively expressing how you feel and what you want

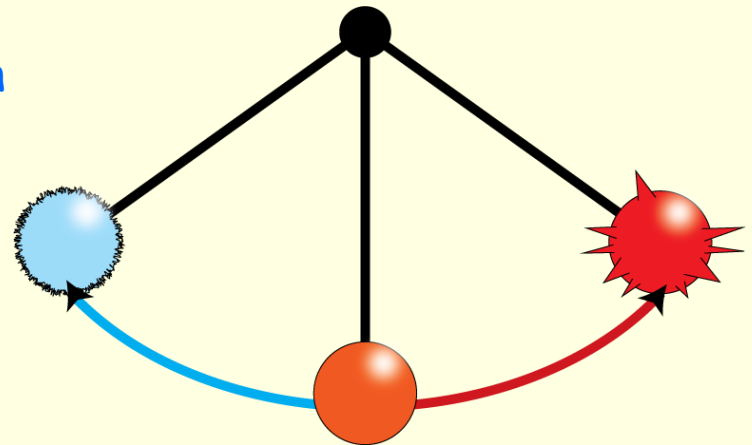
The D E S C Method

Describe the situation - stick to the facts as you see them

Express your feelings about the situation

Say what you want to happen

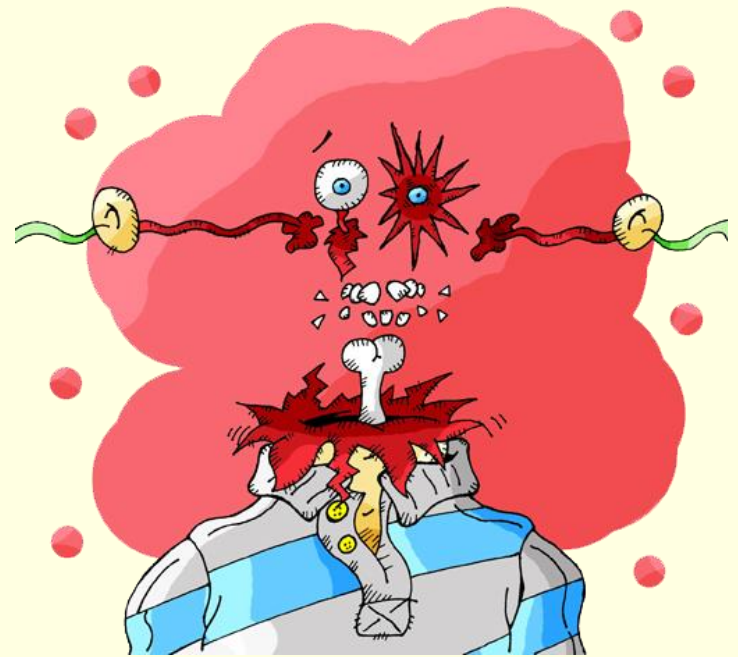
If you don't get the response you want?
Use the **Stuck Record** [next page].



C There is also an option to explain the **consequences** of you not getting what you want. Use the **consequences** option as last resort and when the risk of threatening is acceptable.

Don't give up asking for what you want- use the 'Stuck Record'

- Every child knows how to use the Stuck Record!
- As you know, children ask repeatedly for what they want until they get it, or all hope is lost.
- That's what you need to do! Simply keep repeating more or less what you said the first time.
- Keep this up until you get what you want - or until your partner's head explodes.



Eight steps in becoming more assertive

1. Make the decision to be more assertive [essential first step].
2. Make a list of situations in which you intend to be more assertive.
3. Do the brief reading recommended on the next page.
4. Visualise yourself handling situations on your list assertively.
5. Practise being assertive initially in low risk situations.
6. When about to be assertive in one of your listed situations, use the self calming technique [141 - 146]
7. Choose one of the situations off your list. and JDI [Just Do It] at the next opportunity.
8. Too scared? Work with a therapist on self confidence and on 'facing your fears' NLP techniques.



Free additional reading

You can read much more about how to be assertive by visiting:
<http://selfhelp.brianamartin.co.uk> [Free downloadable reading].

The Chapter 'Difficult Conversations' includes self-help coaching on:

- Preparing for a difficult conversation
- Saying 'NO'
- Saying how you feel and what you want
- Handling criticism

There is also a Chapter:

'How to Become More Self Confident & Assertive'.



'Successful relationships aren't successful because they are problem free. They are successful because the couple have learned how to discuss the problems which come up constructively'.

How to
discuss things
constructively



The biggest problem couples face in attempting constructive discussion is

.....the age old question, 'What comes first?, the chicken or the egg?

The 'right attitude' to each other and to the discussion.

OR

The constructive discussion which may make the 'right attitude' possible?

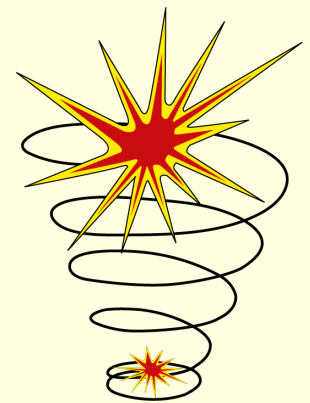
The 'right' attitude' to each other is vital to the success of your attempts to have constructive discussions. See pages 21 – 36.

Not ready?
I suggest you get professional help sooner rather than later!
Pages 19 - 20

For constructive discussion to work you have to suspend hostilities for a while!

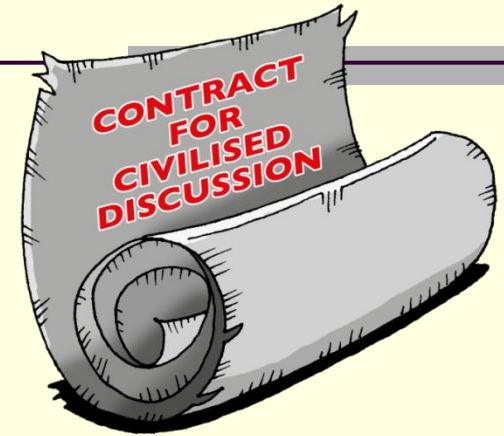
- Fact is, you have to suspend hostilities [even though you may not feel like it] for the duration of the discussion.
- Act professional about it - treat the first few meetings like formal meetings - agreed time, place, agenda, no interruptions and staying calm and factual. In time, it will become natural.
- If you try it a few times and it doesn't work for you, you need professional help, otherwise the inability to discuss things calmly probably means there's no hope for the relationship long term.

Sometimes, the issue/s are too difficult to discuss successfully without professional support and trying to discuss them without help is inadvisable.



Contracting for a 'Constructive Discussion'

- As you well know, when communication has broken down, it becomes impossible to discuss issues without rapidly spiralling into Uproar [pages 95 - 96], or some other 'game'.
- A 'Contract for a Constructive Discussion' [next] is how to try to discuss things calmly.



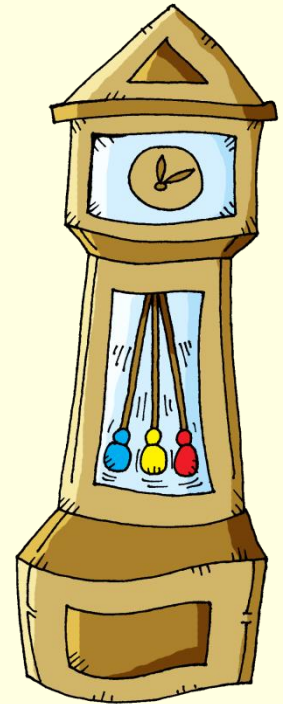
A 'Constructive Discussion' can be used to help decide about Couples Counselling. Don't pile the blame on your partner for the need for counselling support. It's about 'our problems' and 'helping us'.

The Constructive Discussion 'Contract' should include the following.....

1. The issues for discussion fixed in advance.
2. No additional issues may be introduced during the meeting.
3. Location is a place where you will not be interrupted.
4. TV and mobiles switched off.
5. House line ignored if it rings.
6. No abuse or shouting.
7. Prohibited 'wind up' words agreed. [page 96]
8. Both remain seated throughout.
9. No alcohol prior to or during discussion.
10. Have a 'TIME OUT' agreement [next page].
11. Agree the 'Uninterrupted speaking time' length [pages 85 - 86].

Advance agreement of a 'Time Out' clause essential

- The constructive discussion 'contract' should have a '**TIME OUT**' clause. This allows either party to withdraw from the discussion for a cooling off period of minutes, hours, even days.
- When '**TIME OUT**' is used, it's conditional on the party requesting the '**TIME OUT**' to agree when the discussion is to be continued. It mustn't be used to avoid discussing issues, only to allow a cooling off period.

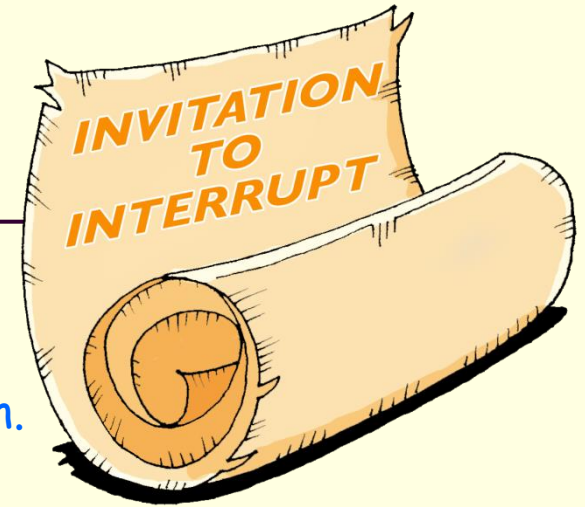


Uninterrupted speaking time

- A key feature of a Constructive Discussion is 'Uninterrupted Speaking Time'. It means just that! Absolutely no interruptions of any kind. Questions and clarifications should be saved until the person has completed their agreed speaking time without interruption.
- Speaking time should be in equal amounts of say, five or ten minutes at a time each. If you or your partner don't use all your time, the other still gets the time agreed.
- Have a pen and a rule that whoever's turn it is to speak holds the pen and may not be interrupted.



Don't invite interruption



The biggest problem with an uninterrupted speaking time agreement is that the person who is speaking doesn't resist inviting interruption.

This is what happens:

1. Person A has started their agreed five minutes uninterrupted speaking time, when Person B pulls a face or shakes their head at something which has been said.
2. Person A reacts - 'What, why are you shaking your head, you know what I am saying is right!'
3. Person B accepts the 'invitation', responds to the question, and starts off on their own stuff.

Uninterrupted speaking time has broken down!

Expect your partner's body language to signal disagreement with what you are saying. Don't let it throw you off track: finish what you want to say.

Other things which will help you have a successful discussion

- Try to avoid the 'you' blaming word. Focus on yourself and what emotions you are feeling. Stick to the facts as you see them: avoid critical opinions.
- A big block to effective listening is thinking about your response while your partner is still talking and worrying that you will forget something you want to say in response. Have a pen and paper handy and jot down bullet points to remind you what to come back to.
- Try to be empathic, to understand why they are feeling the way they do, even if you find it impossible to agree. Try to convince them you understand how and why they feel the way they do.
- Think about your response only when you are clear why your partner is feeling the way they do.

A few more 'Do's and Don'ts'

Observation
of some
agreed do's
and don'ts

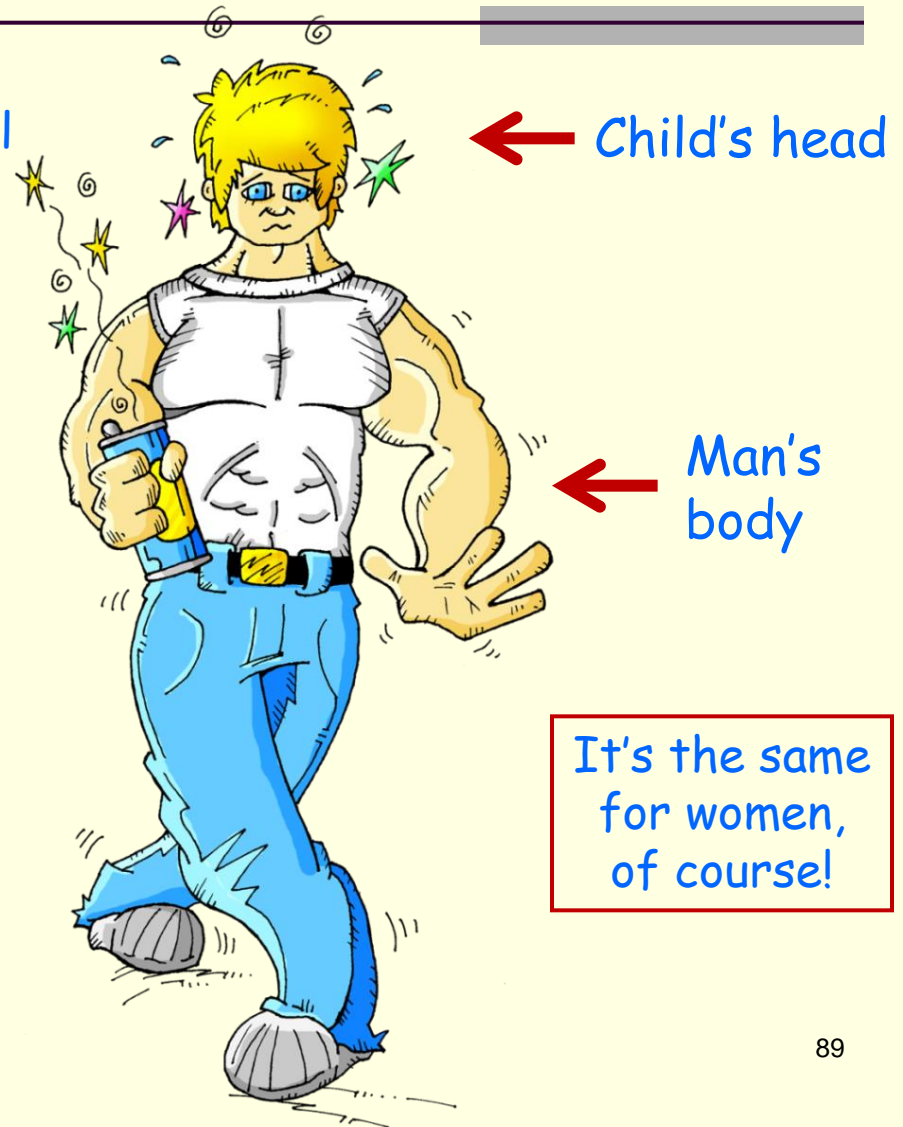


Don't drink alcohol when there are issues to discuss

When we drink much, our rational common sense head is replaced by our child head.

If we are holding unresolved anger or hurt, it will come out, often with destructive consequences.

Save discussion of issues for when you are alcohol free.





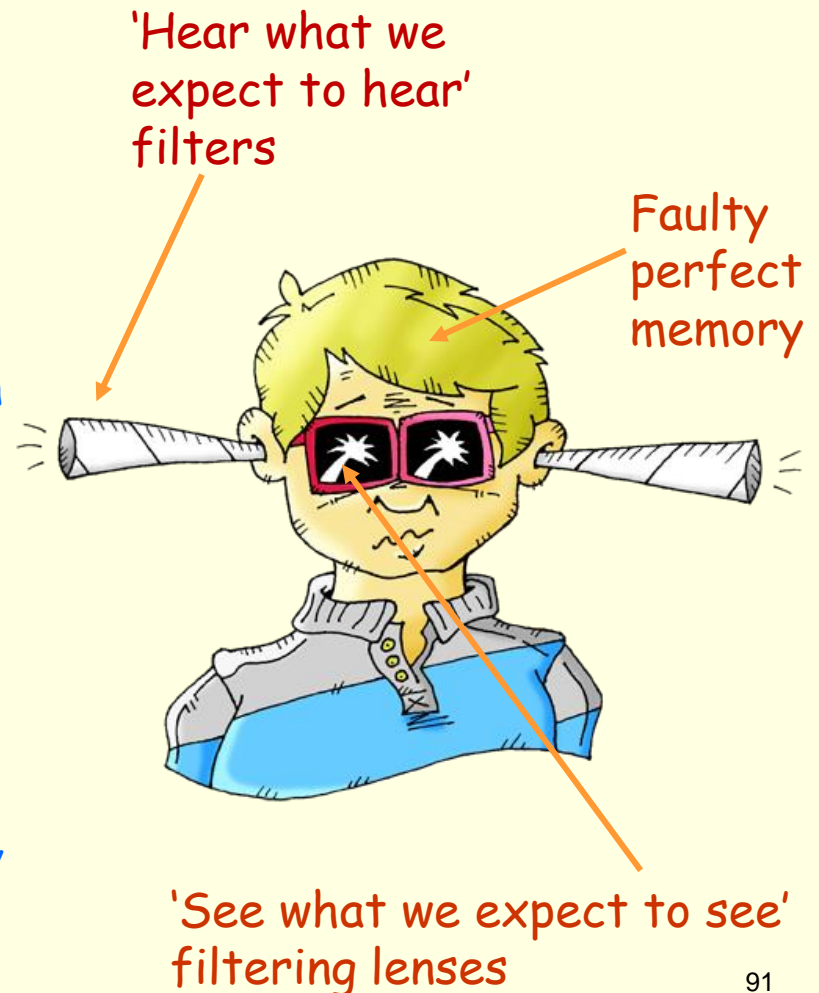
Don't argue about the 'facts'

- When your partner's version of what happened is different to yours, they may be lying to win the argument, but it's quite possible that they are simply recalling things differently and believe what they are saying.
- This is because we unconsciously distort what happens, selectively filter information, believe what fits for us, see what we expect to see and fill in missing bits.
- The 'reality' we remember sometimes finishes up very different to the 'reality' our partner remembers.

In my work with couples, I often have to invite them to accept that they have experienced and remember things differently. I get them to concentrate on what needs to happen to move forward, rather than keep trying to convince each other about the 'correct' version.

We unconsciously filter and distort what happens to create our own 'facts'

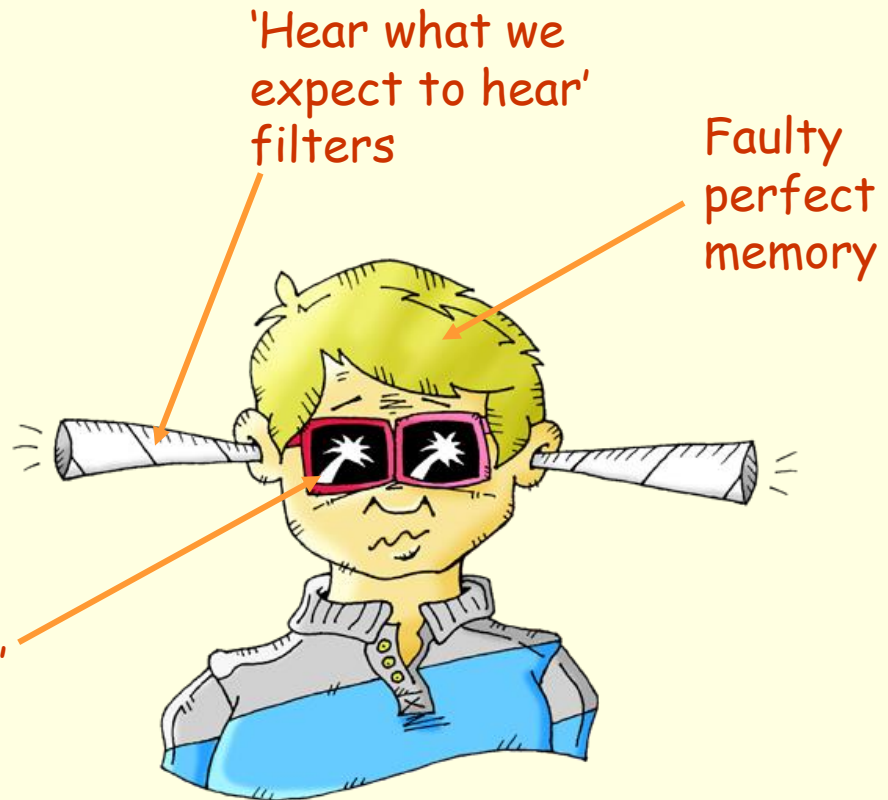
- We filter and distort what happens and fill in missing bits, to make things fit our expectations.
- In doing this we often interpret things so they confirm what we expect, whilst being blind to any contrary evidence which might mean we have interpreted something incorrectly.
- **For example:** Jobs not being done around the house is often interpreted as evidence that the partner doesn't care about the relationship. Sometimes this is true, but often it's different priorities.



.....so it fits what we believe

- We often hear only what we expect to hear.
- See what we expect to see.
- Remember things in a way which fits our personal 'Map of the World'.

'See what we expect to see'
filtering lenses



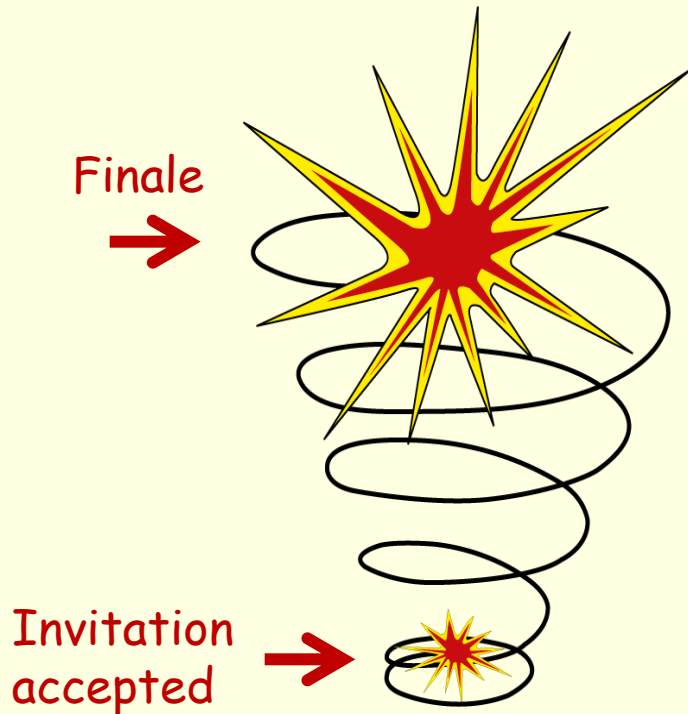
We really, absolutely, believe our distorted version of what happened - which is often not the same as another person's distorted version. We accept that we can get things wrong, but not that we did get it wrong on that occasion.

If you can't agree about something, agree to disagree and move on

- Don't try to win arguments: a relationship isn't a tennis match, it's a life journey together. Winners make losers. Losers look for chances to get even.
- Arguing usually doesn't usually change anything for the better. Each person strengthens their attack/defence as they try to win. Both finish up even more convinced than ever that they are right and even more afraid to lose face after arguing so strongly.
- Trying to get someone to change their position by arguing is like trying to get a sharp stick out of the ground by pushing down on it! It just gets more embedded.



Don't play the 'Uproar' game



- It's important to discuss the Uproar game and the invitations [things said and done that cause arguments].
- Key to avoiding Uproar is to spot the invitation into a game and decline it [by not rising to the bait].
- Maybe you could agree a humorous codeword to use when an invitation is received, a codeword which says 'let's not play' e.g. 'sausages'.

When resisting Uproar invitations, acknowledge your partners feelings, 'I can see you are upset/angry/annoyed, but let's not fight, let's discuss'.

Ban these 'Uproar' invitation words!

- You started it.....No I didn't, you did!
- It's your fault - if you hadn't.....
- You need talk - how about when.....
- You always....
- You never.....
- You saidNo I didn't.....
- You don't do your share around the house
- The trouble with you is.....

There are 'special words' too - words used to hurt each other in previous fights. It would be helpful to make a list of your special hurtful words and agree to avoid using them in future.



These 'special words' keep relationships in a blaming loop which blocks constructive communication.

A few other games played by couples

NIGYSOB 'Now I've got you, you son of a bitch' Partner 'A' lets Partner 'B' dig themselves into a deeper and deeper hole, before launching a devastating attack, against which Partner 'B' has no defence.

Payback A passive aggressive game which is all about revenge, about getting even. It's a retaliation game which is often played over a long period - months or years.

'You should know what I want[without me saying]. A passive aggressive game where the lead player deliberately does not say what they want and gets upset when they don't get it.

'Yes, but.....' Probably the most played passive aggressive game. Whatever you suggest is not right. Remember, passive aggressive types don't know what they want, but they do know it's not what you want [pages 121 - 122].

Archaeology. This is constantly 'digging up the past', with both parties obsessively accusing the other of having done things in the past which are causing the present problems in the relationship.

Don't procrastinate - do those little jobs around the house right away

- You may think this is a trivial point!? Believe me, it isn't! Time after time, in my work with couples, procrastination by the male partner in doing chores and tackling DIY jobs around the house has been a major issue.
- The female partner often interprets this as proof that her partner doesn't care for her.
- 'If he cared for me he would get on and do these things'. 'It would be one way of showing that he loves me!'
- A job not done is like a stone in a shoe. It gets more and more irritating until removed.



DIY procrastination alone will not kill the relationship, but it doesn't help!

A partner who is verbally abusive

- If your partner verbally abuses you, your priority is to get them to withdraw the Permission [pages 151 - 152] they have given themselves to be abusive to you.
- If it's safe, take on the storm that may follow and put your hand up in a stop signal. Tell them, 'Stop! I am not putting up with that'. Refuse to continue the exchange until they adapt a more acceptable tone.
- If the abuse continues, simply repeat the 'Stop!' message and continue repeating it until they adopt a more reasonable tone.
- Think carefully before walking out of the room since this can enrage the other person and result in more extreme behaviour.



Don't add to your 'Stop' message. Don't get drawn into responding, defending or explaining. Simply repeat the Stuck Record 'Stop' message until you get the result you want.



Jealousy and what to do about it

- Reasonable trust is central to a successful relationship. The jealous person is prevented from trusting by a fear of being abandoned; a deep fear that their partner is bound to find someone else more desirable and leave them.
- Sometimes, the jealous person trusts their partner, but is afraid that they will be seduced by someone they will come in contact with.
- Jealousy may be rational, or irrational, or a mixture of both. The jealous person is in emotional agony whenever their partner is, or could be, in contact with potential rivals. This leads to tantrums, displays of anger, constant interrogation and controlling behaviour.
- Jealousy is very emotionally painful for the jealous person and difficult to live with for their partner.
- Jealousy does not respond to logic i.e. the absence of any evidence to support the fears does not convince the jealous person that they will not be abandoned.

Rational Jealousy

Rational jealousy. There is some reason for concerns about the partner's behaviour. For example, the partner suddenly starts taking more care of their appearance, goes out with friends more, sometimes comes home much later than expected, is sometimes vague about where they are going and who with. Sometimes the partner will stop leaving their 'phone around and start taking it with them when they leave the room - even to the toilet! The partner socialising with friends who are not in a stable relationship can also provoke jealous anxiety.



How to know if you may be being cheated on?
There is a list of possible clues on page 102.



Irrational jealousy and it's causes

Irrational jealousy - is a deeply anxiety provoking, irrational, condition. The sufferer feel insecure about their relationship even though there is no evidence to support their deep fear of being abandoned. The jealous person feels uncontrollably anxious whenever their partner is, or might be, in the company of potential rivals.

What causes irrational jealousy?

Irrational jealousy is often rooted in some combination of:-

- Low self esteem [which means the jealous person can't believe that their partner will be able to resist the lure of others].
- Having been betrayed in the past
- Having betrayed others in the past
- Insecure relationships as a child e.g. parents splitting, abusive or neglectful parenting, sibling rivalry, betrayal by a friend.

How to decide if your jealousy is rational or irrational

Your jealousy may be rational if your partner ticks several of the following, particularly if the behaviour is new:-

- Keeps their mobile with them all the time, even in the toilet, or starts leaving it around more [maybe they have a secret extra 'phone].
- Starts being more interested in sex and wanting to try new things, or loses interest in sex.
- Develops a new hobby which means spending time away from you.
- Starts taking a lot more interest in weight, appearance and hygiene.
- Starts spending more time on the internet.
- Becomes more moody
- Deletes all texts
- Rushes to answer the 'phone
- Goes out of the room to take calls

Remember - these are reasons to be vigilant - NOT proof

Can jealousy be 'cured'?

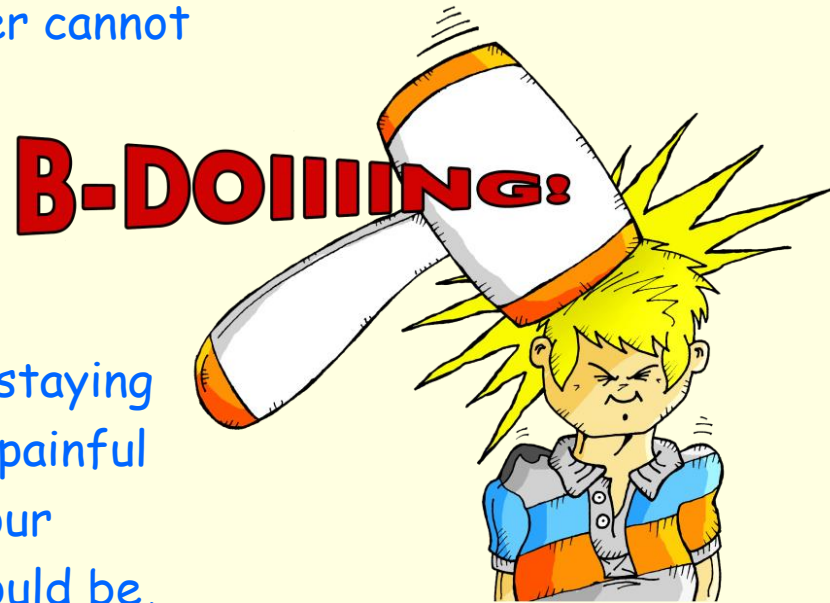
Yes - very, very slowly.....



- The ultimate cure is a long-term, secure, loving relationship.
- The attitude and behaviour of the partner will be a decisive factor in progress to cure [See pages 106 - 107]
- Since earlier life experience is the root cause and driver of irrational jealousy, therapeutic help may be needed to heal the past and to help improve self esteem.
- The jealous person needs to learn self-calming and impulse control techniques [pages 141 - 146]. Even though they continue to experience the pangs of intense jealous pain, they can learn to handle it and to manage their responses so they don't damage the relationship.

How to handle rational jealousy

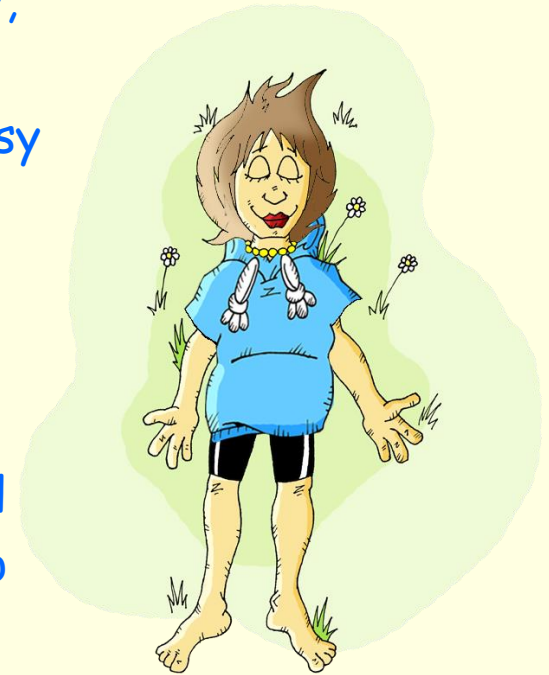
- If there is evidence that your partner cannot be trusted you should confront them with the evidence - if it's safe to do so. If it's not safe, you should think about ending the relationship.
- Unless the problem behaviour stops, staying with that partner will continue to be painful and could be seriously damaging to your emotional health. Painful though it would be, you should seriously consider the 'pain now instead of pain always' option and exit the relationship ASAP.
- Who knows, maybe the threat of being dumped would bring about a change in their behaviour?



Time to knock
this relationship
on the head?

Overcoming your own irrational jealousy

- Irrational jealousy responds, but responds slowly, to personal counselling or psychotherapy to build self esteem. If you suffer from irrational jealousy and you can find the money, you should start personal work with a therapist.
- However, the first thing to do is learn to control the behaviours which are damaging your relationship. The self calming and impulse control techniques [pages 141 - 146] are designed to help you do just that.
- Remember, no-one and nothing can make you react this way or that [page 158]. How you react to your feelings is always up to you.

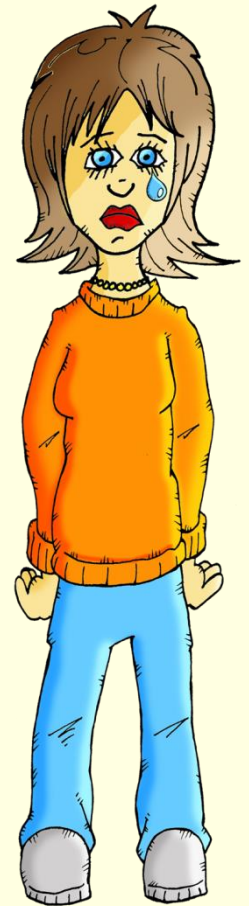


Use Impulse
Control and
Self Calming

Handling my partners irrational jealousy

- A partner's irrational jealousy is, amongst other things, very frustrating. Nothing said or done to reassure them has any lasting impact. Your empathy switch may sometimes get turned hard to 'off'.
- **However, empathy is what is called for.** The jealous partner suffers real, uncontrollable, emotional pain driven from their subconscious. You may have felt jealous yourself sometime in the past. If you have, remember how that feels.
- Look on the irrational jealousy as a condition which is emotional agony for your partner. It's not responsive to logic - knowing that there is no basis for the fear that you will cheat doesn't block it out. It is not cured by reassurances.
- Your partner may know that there is no reason to doubt you, but is so insecure and scared of being abandoned that they find it impossible to control their feelings. [continued on next page]

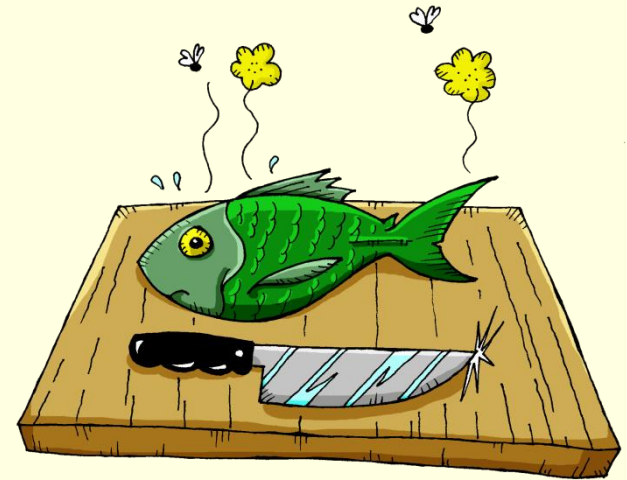
If your partner suffers from irrational jealousy [continued]



- You need to be loving, patient, supportive and reassuring and not resent that you have to do a lot of explaining.
- You need to be open in everything you do and try to minimise doing things which your partner finds anxiety provoking.
- **Be predictable, don't do the unexpected.** If you're running late, call. If you say you will call, call. Do what you say you will do.
- Remember, that the longer you're together [and in the absence of any jealousy provoking behaviour by you] the more your partner will feel safe and more trusting.
- **Remember, your partners irrational fear is rooted in damage from their past. Your challenge is to give them the love they need and take care not to inflict further damage.**

The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

One thing that's clear to me, if you decide to confess, think very carefully before deciding to withhold key parts. Confessing to your partner that you have lied may take some getting over. If your partner later discovers that your confession was less than the full truth, the damage may be irreparable. 'I can't trust you. How do I know there isn't even more? What are you still holding back?'



If you decide to confess it might be best to get the whole smelly fish on the table - or not at all!

Male Sexual Problems

- Sexual performance failure leads to a self-perpetuating anxiety loop. Failure leads to fear of failure, leads to failure. Whether the problem is erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation or inability to ejaculate in a timely way, the penis will not perform to anxious instructions.
- Porn films portraying gigantic penises and incredible sexual stamina have not helped. One of my teenage clients thought porn stars were normal and he was abnormal. He had become suicidal when a girlfriend commented on his 'abnormality' and spread it around college.
- Sexual potency is a massively important self esteem issue for males and usually very difficult for them to talk to their partner about. They are often fairly desperate, even suicidal, when they come to see me. Sometimes it's the survival of their relationship which is at risk.

Sexual problems caused by conflict about sexual problems

The biggest causes of sexual problems brought by my clients have been:
Female clients: Unresolved hurt and anger related to their partner [pages 24 - 28]. Unresolved hurt and anger cause the loss of 'that loving feeling' and lead to disinterest in sex. Resolution of the anger and hurt is the key to recovery [pages 34 - 35 & 159 - 166].

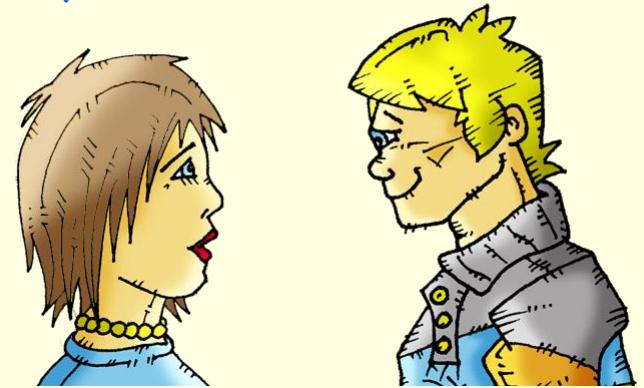
Male clients: The anxiety 'loop' is the main problem - anxiety about performance failure leading to performance failure. Typically, the partner of the male client finding it hard to 'perform', feels that the problem is that he no longer finds her sexually desirable. This is deeply hurtful and her hurt converts to anger [pages 24 - 28], leading to her being aggressively critical, not only about his performance failure, but about everything. In bed she wants to cuddle up, but he fears the shame of her criticism and becomes anxious that he will fail again. Not surprisingly, Willy won't perform, which leads to further criticism. As one client put it, 'how can I perform in bed when she's horrible to me all the while'.

Helping the male partner overcome sexual dysfunction

Sexual dysfunction is a very common problem suffered by millions of men. I see this as a joint problem needing a mutual approach. A good idea is to buy one of the many books on the subject and both read it.

Those experiencing sexual dysfunction need a lot of understanding and reassurance from their partner. They need:-

- 'Permission to fail' so they don't dread failing.
- Loving acceptance that the problem is anxiety, not inferiority.
- Support in planning sexual practices which will be helpful.
- Most important, they need to be able to talk about the problem with their partner.



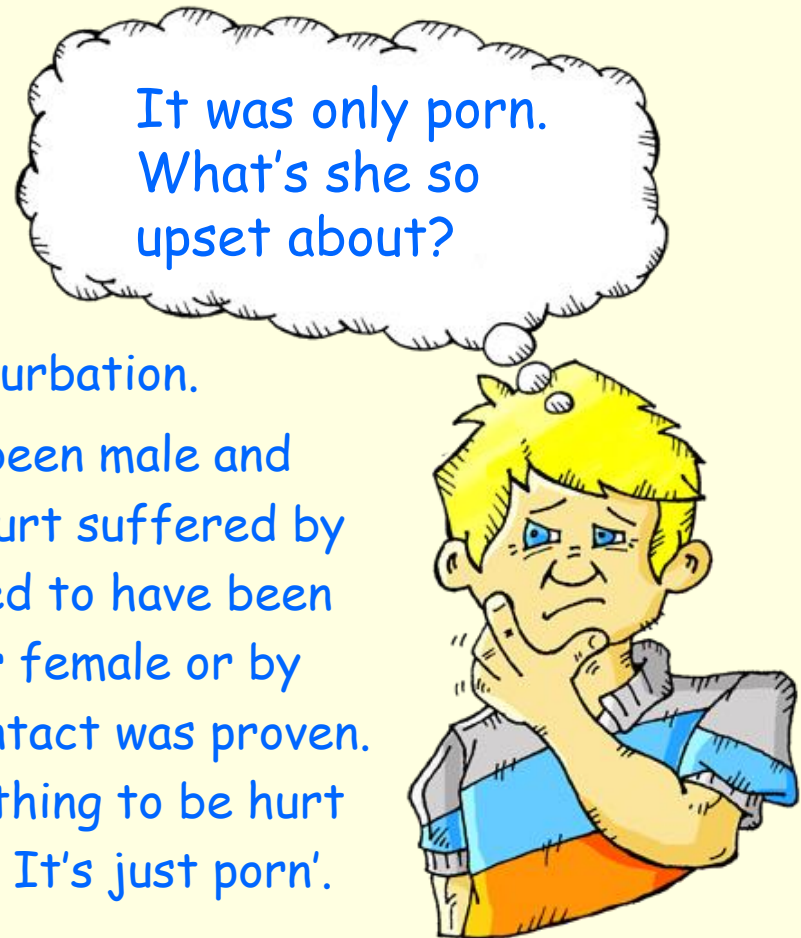
Criticism and complaints about performance failure increase male anxiety and make matters worse !

Techniques to overcome male sexual performance problems

- I would definitely recommend working with a hypnotherapist who also uses NLP and EMDR techniques. My preferred hypnotherapy 'script' is about total focus on the partner during the sex act and when thinking about it. The idea is to use erotic thoughts and sensations to overpower anxiety by distracting attention from the problem.
- **Total focus means using all your senses** - focussing on how your partner looks during sex, how different parts of her feel to your touch, what she smells like, tastes like, moves like and the sounds she makes.
- NLP techniques [such as the 'Swish' technique] are very powerful in combatting anticipatory anxiety. EMDR is brilliant at smoothing away anxiety attached to remembered sexual failure.
- For erectile dysfunction, physical aids such as a penis pump should also be explored. Medical help such as Viagra or testosterone supplement is often part of the answer.

Sexual problems - Pornography etc.

- My work with addictions includes addiction to pornography and sexual chat by text, 'phone or online. Usually, it's all erotic fantasy without physical contact, but resulting in masturbation.
- My sexually addicted clients have all been male and often didn't understand the level of hurt suffered by their partner when they are discovered to have been enjoying sexual stimulation by another female or by a gay man, even though no physical contact was proven. Men often seem to reason 'There's nothing to be hurt about. There was no physical contact. It's just porn'.

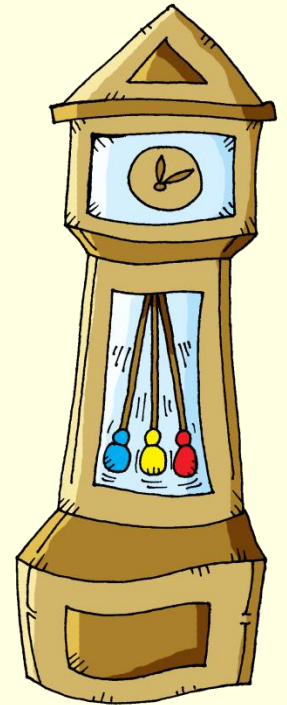


Working with addiction to sexual fantasy

- Usually the partner of the addicted male has accidentally uncovered evidence of his activities on his mobile 'phone or on the family computer. The partner's hurt and disgust with the images and content resulted in an ultimatum to get help in stopping, without which my clients would not have undertaken therapy.
- With this type of problem, I work on the underlying issues, which is sometimes an unsatisfactory sexual relationship with their partner.
- I also use aversion hypnotherapy, including vivid visualisation of the possible consequences of being caught again and the horror of the moment of being confronted with fresh evidence by their partner.

Working with addiction to sexual fantasy

- Whether you are male or female, if you are addicted to sexual activities which your partner would be hurt or disgusted by, I suggest you make the decision to stop.
- You could also decide to work on your sex life with your partner. Maybe they will indulge you in [or even enjoy] some of your fantasies!?
- Be sexually assertive: know what you want and say what you want! If you find this too embarrassing, write it down and get your partner to write down their desires too! Then swap lists.
- Otherwise, find yourself a therapist experienced in this type of work. You will find that the initial embarrassment is soon overcome!



Time to do something about it!

UK porn sites get over 2.5 million visits a day!

Next: Want a personality transplant for your partner? Not possible, but.....

- Our personality is, in some respects, substantially 'hard wired', a personal development programme file which we can't easily edit.
- In the early years of a relationship personality differences are less of a problem, tending to be obscured by the love and excitement of the honeymoon years. Early warning signs of possible personality clash and behavioural difficulties are ignored.
- As the relationship matures, the differences become much more evident and can become a source of incompatibility and conflict.

Although personality cannot be easily modified, if at all, behaviour can be changed with effort. It depends if the person has sufficient motivation and determination to change their behaviour.

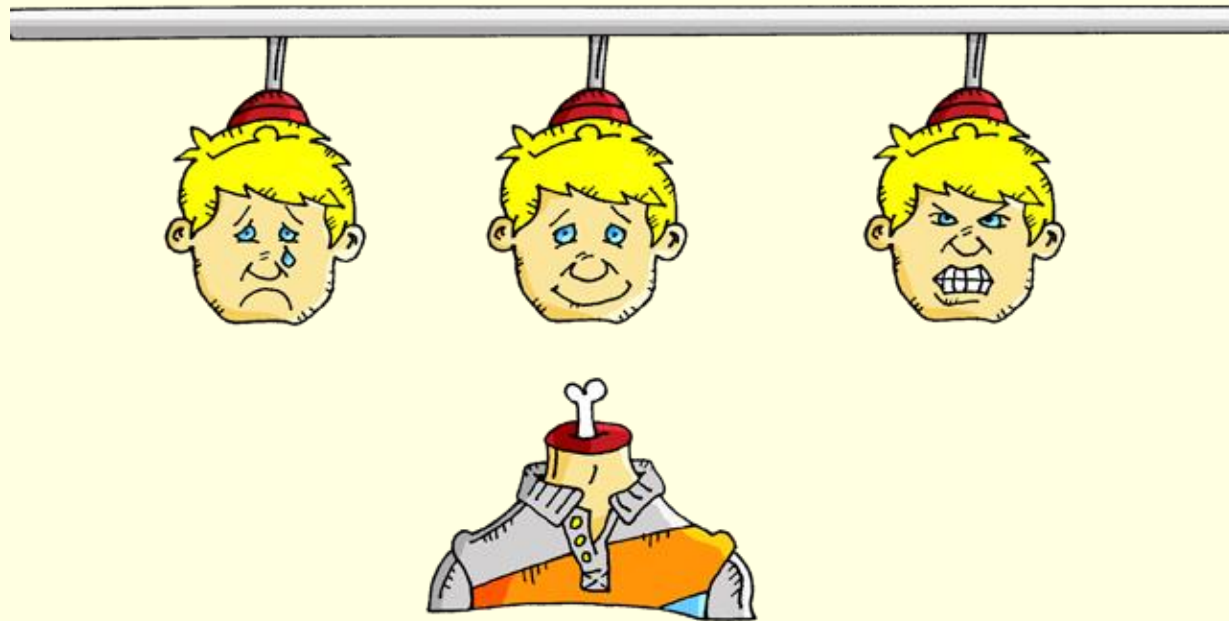
'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus'

- As a result of tens of thousands of years of evolution, men and women have grown to have some fundamental personality differences. This is the topic of a widely read book by John Gray, 'Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus'.
- One profound difference, is that when there is a problem in the relationship the stereotype woman will want to talk about it, whereas the stereotype man will want to 'withdraw into his cave and try to avoid it or solve it on his own'.
- Many of the couples I have worked with experienced difficulties because the male [but not always the male] couldn't or wouldn't talk about issues.
- If you are a male reader and this is you, you need to decide what to do about it, if your relationship is to prosper.

Personality Differences Compatibility Test

- I sometimes get clients to do a compatibility test. I invite them to list what they would like their partner to change about themselves.
- We then separate realistically achievable changes in behaviour from those personality driven aspects which are unlikely to change much e.g. low empathy quotient, controlling, obsessive, perfectionist, pessimistic, anti-social, selfish, not demonstrative.
- It's then for them to decide whether they can learn to accept and stop resenting, that about their partner which is deeply rooted in personality, or continue to fall out about behaviour and ways of thinking which are unlikely to change.
- **More often than not, the result of the test is very positive.** Couples learn to tolerate differences when they realise they are rooted in personality and not because their partner doesn't love them.

Personality cannot be changed much..... but behaviour can!

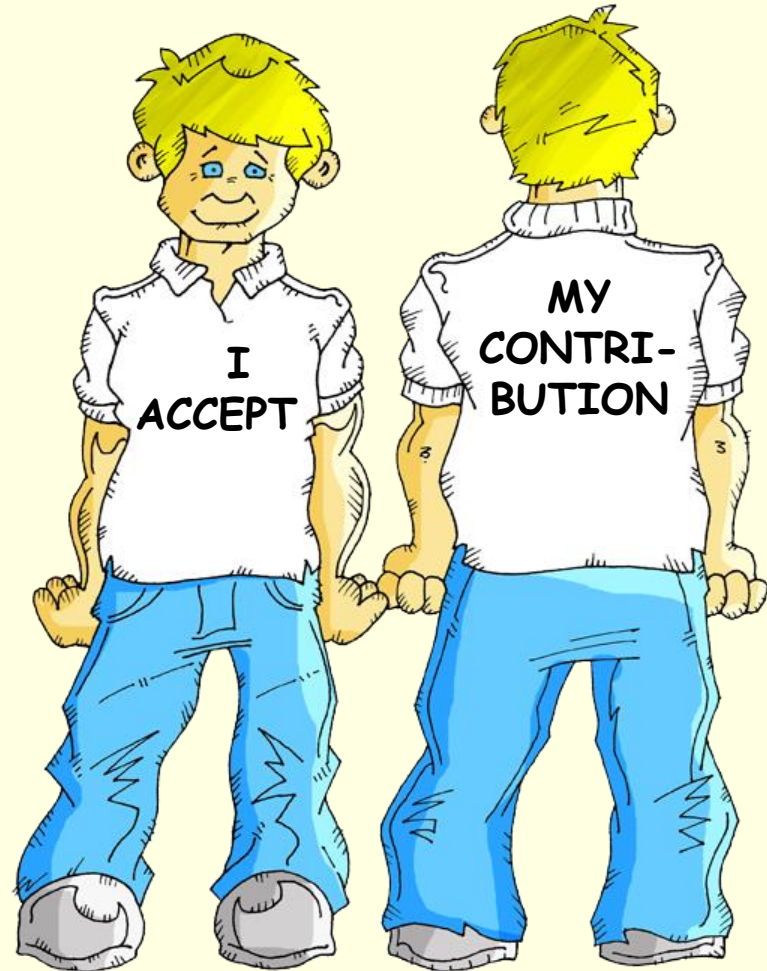


Personality type cannot be changed to a different personality type but, with sustained effort, some behaviour driven by personality factors can be changed - providing the person is committed to changing.

This is why the 'contract for change' is so important [page 11].

Changing your personality driven behaviour

- You can't just be you, if your partner is not happy with the you you are - not if you want to stay together, that is!
- Personality transplants aren't available, but you can change some of your ways of thinking and your behaving if you contract with yourself to do so [page 11]



Passive Aggressive personality types

Passive aggressive personality types are often reluctant to take the lead as this involves knowing what they want and being open about it. Yet when you try to take the lead they may launch into the 'Yes, but...' game. Using controlling behaviour with passive aggressive types will lead to unproductive struggles.

To read more about personality types, including Passive Aggressive, read 'Personality Adaptations' by Ian Stewart and Vann Joines.

If your partner has passive aggressive tendency:

The secret is to nurture them, be playful and encourage them to express how they feel and what they want.

If you have passive aggressive tendency:

You need to be more assertive [pages 65 - 78], think about what you want and be prepared to ask for it.

Examples of passive aggressive behaviour

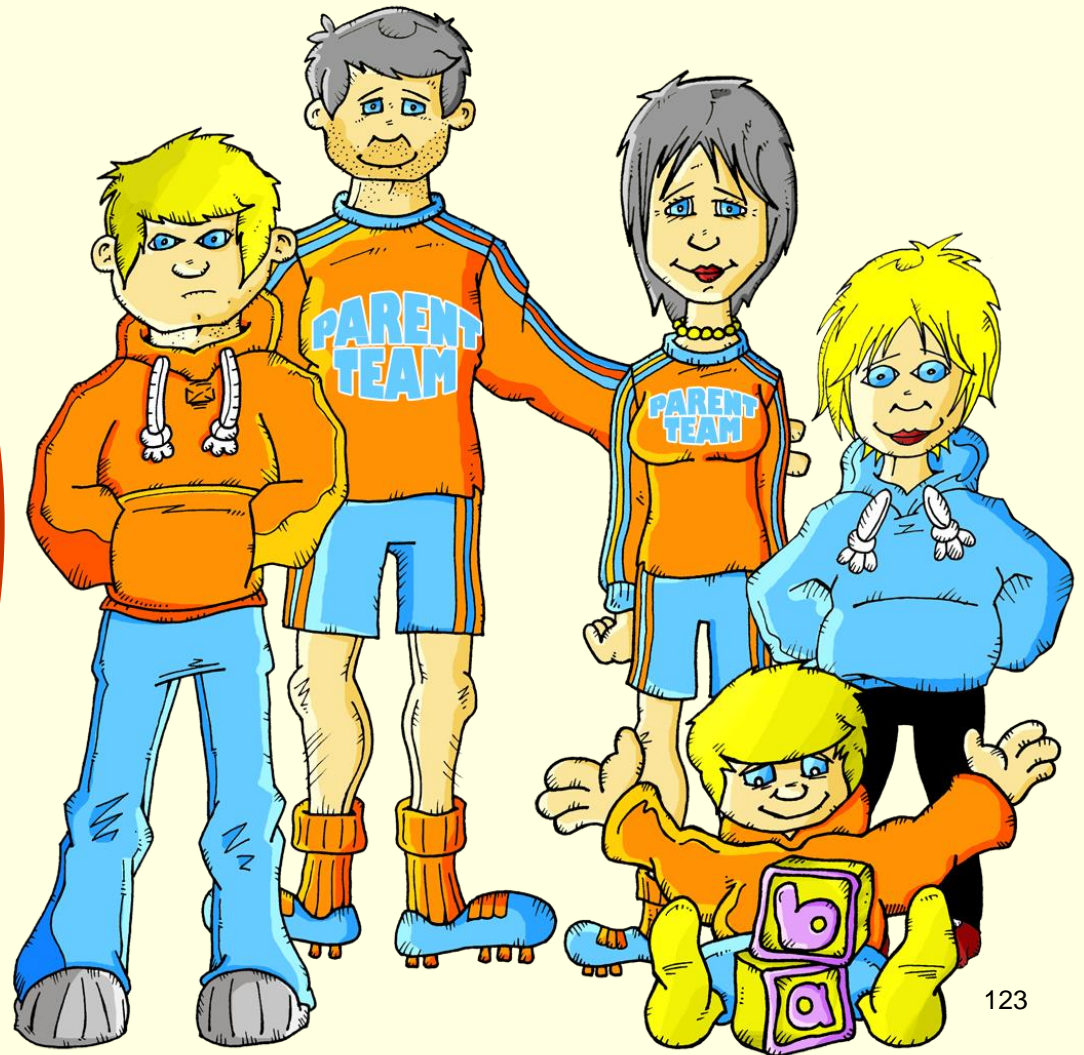
- Air of grievance/chip on shoulder/cold freeze treatment
- Deliberate 'forgetfulness'
- Indecisiveness: stubbornness
- Obstruction [includes the 'Yes but' game]
- Refusal to apologise: speaking quietly/mumbling
- Refusal to acknowledge partners point of view
- Refusing to explain why upset
['You should know why I'm upset' game]
- Not saying what they want to see whether they get it and being resentful if they don't
[the 'You should know what I want' game].



Passive Aggressive Definition: Behaviour which impedes, or does nothing to help, problem resolution.

Managing your children's behaviour

Successful
Parenting.
The
Ultimate
Challenge?



If a child lives with.....

-criticism, it learns to condemn
-hostility, it learns aggression
-ridicule , it learns to be shy
-shame, it learns to be guilty
-tolerance, it learns to be patient
-encouragement, it learns confidence
-praise, it learns to feel good about itself
-fairness, it learns to be fair
-security, it learns to trust
-approval, it learns to like itself
-acceptance and love , it learns to find love in itself and in the world.

Anon



Successful Parenting - The ultimate challenge?

One of the most common problems which brings clients into my consulting room is the behaviour of their children, especially their teenage children, and disagreement between partners about the best way to tackle problem behaviour.



Develop a parenting partnership

It's essential that you and your partner try to agree how to handle the parenting issues which come up. If you don't, the child will be confused and, naturally, choose to take the softest options.

- Discuss the issues when the child is not around and agree how to handle them.
- Don't disagree in front of the child.
- Back up your partner. If you disagree talk about it later.
- Don't compete for the child's affection by conceding what your partner won't.
- Don't fight within earshot of child.



Achieving a balanced approach: Not too soft: not too tough

- My aim in advising on parenting issues is to achieve a balanced approach, an approach which is neither too controlling nor too liberal: love and support balanced by respect for the rights of others, including parents and the rest of the family.
- In my experience, parents suffering child behavioural problems have got the balance wrong. They are either too tough or too soft.
- Even more problematic - one is tough and the other soft - very confusing for the child and providing endless possibilities for manipulation of the parents [especially when the parents are separated].

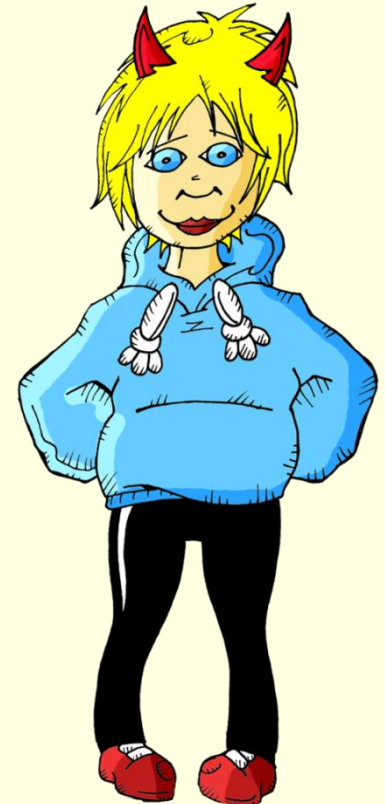


Keep the child in an OK position

- As the struggle develops, it's easy to forget at times that the child is an OK young person who sometimes [maybe often] does not behave OK.
- Keep the child in an OK position. Feel love, show love, be tactile.
- If you handle a situation badly [maybe in anger] apologise.

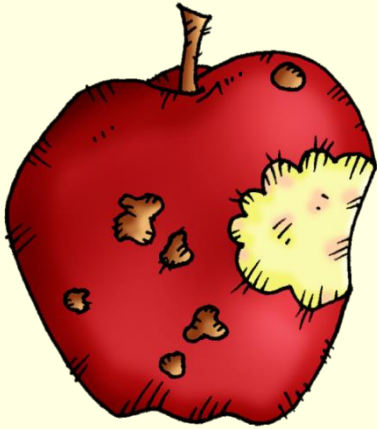


An OK young person
who doesn't behave
OK sometimes

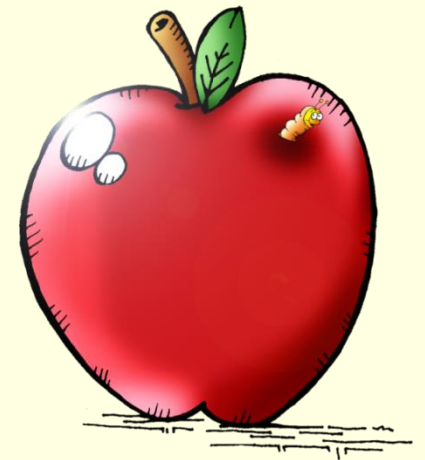


NOT A bad child

Good apple: bad behaviour? Or a bad apple?



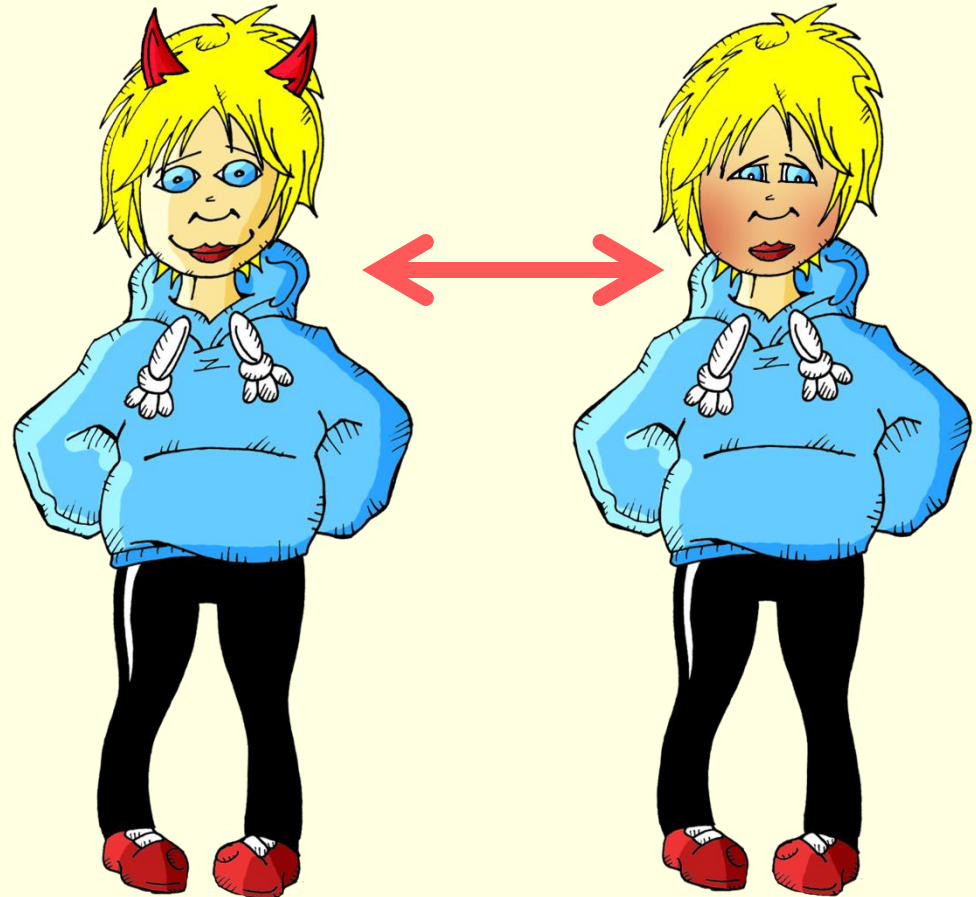
If you can keep in mind that the child is an OK young person who does some things which are not OK [rather than a 'bad' child] you will be able to handle things much better.



The range of possible consequences of over-control

To grow up as responsible, emotionally healthy, adults, children need development space, need room to grow, need to learn from the consequences of their own decisions and mistakes.

If you are over-controlling, you may finish up with either a shy teenager or a rebel.

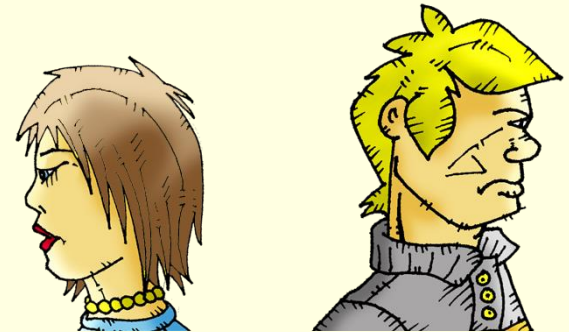


Rebellious
teenager

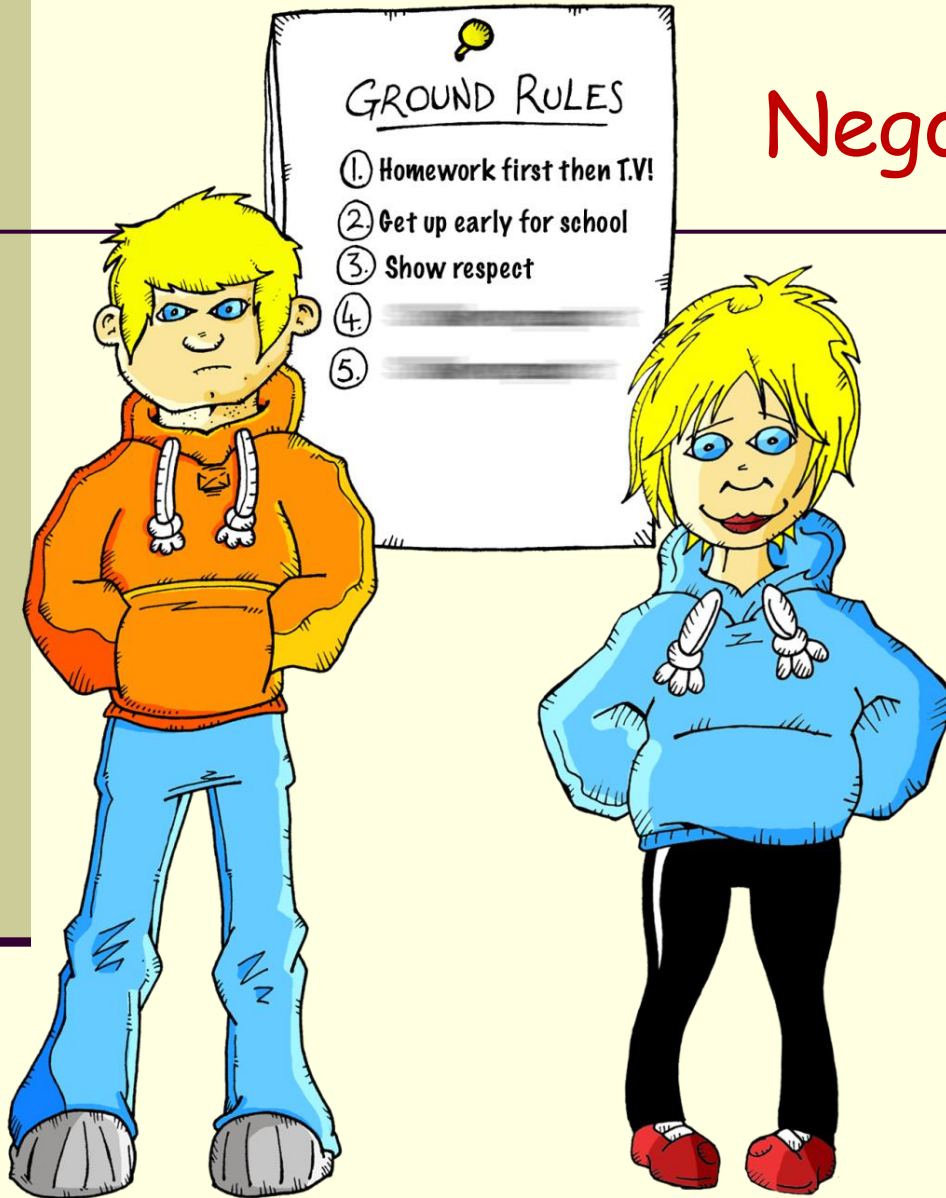
Shy
Teenager

If you and the other parent are separated

- It's particularly difficult when the genetic parents are no longer together. The custody parent with whom the child lives may be trying to be firm with the child on specific behavioural issues, but the other parent wants to win the child's love and undermines the custody parent by being 'soft' on the issues.
- Often, when there is a relationship breakup, mom and dad cannot, or will not, develop a parenting partnership, sometimes even competing for the loyalty of the child by being more permissive than the other and criticising each other to the child.
- Separated parents should be determined to suspend their parenting differences for the good of the child and agree how to handle the issues which inevitably come up.



Negotiate Ground Rules



A common practice is to have a set of rules which are on display for easy reminding.

If you impose the rules they will be much more difficult to get compliance with than if you sit with the children and negotiate, get their agreement.

It's much more powerful to be able to say 'That's what we agreed' when there is resistance and non-compliance.

Have sanctions & rewards

- Alongside the ground rules, there need to be clearly understood and consistently applied sanctions and rewards. What is the reward for compliant behaviour and what the sanction for non-compliance?
- Sanctions need to be understood in advance by the child and fair - commensurate with the 'offence'.
- Be careful to 'avoid over the top' punishments which seem unfair to the child e.g. taking away their toy/game/phone/pocket money for a month when a week would make the point.



Be selective about which issues to confront



In achieving the balance between over-controlling and over-permissive, be selective about what to ignore, what to permit and what to resist.

List the issues and decide which category each falls into.

Over-controlling parents have most issues in the red zone and few green items.

Don't make empty threats. Stick to your guns - unless you're wrong!

- The child's behaviour may get worse for a time as they test your resolve on new ground rules. You mustn't soften at this stage.
- If the sanction is, for example, to stop pocket money for a week don't give in before the week is up. If getting up late means no lift, no lift it is, even though they will be late for school. If taking away their mobile for a specific time is the sanction, do it. If being grounded is the sanction, do it! [However, early release from a sanction is a good way of rewarding good behaviour].
- **A small example of how not to do it.** Granddad told his three year old grandson in the garden centre - don't touch that [toy] or you are going straight home. Grandson ignored him and picked up the toy. Did granddad take him home? No! How much notice will grandson take of granddad's threats in future?
- **Be careful what you threaten. Unless you are prepared to carry out the threat, you are making future problems.**

Don't give in - use the Stuck Record

- Every child knows how to use the Stuck Record! They ask repeatedly for what they want until they get it, or all hope is lost.
- To use the Stuck Record, simply keep repeating what you said initially. Keep this up until the child gives up. Don't let them wear you down!
- However, one client told me she was in her twenties before she realised her father had never said 'No' to her. All her life he had been using 'yes, but not yet' or 'yes, but not now'.



The ultimate threat - exclusion from the family home

This is, for most parents, a difficult [or impractical] threat to carry out.

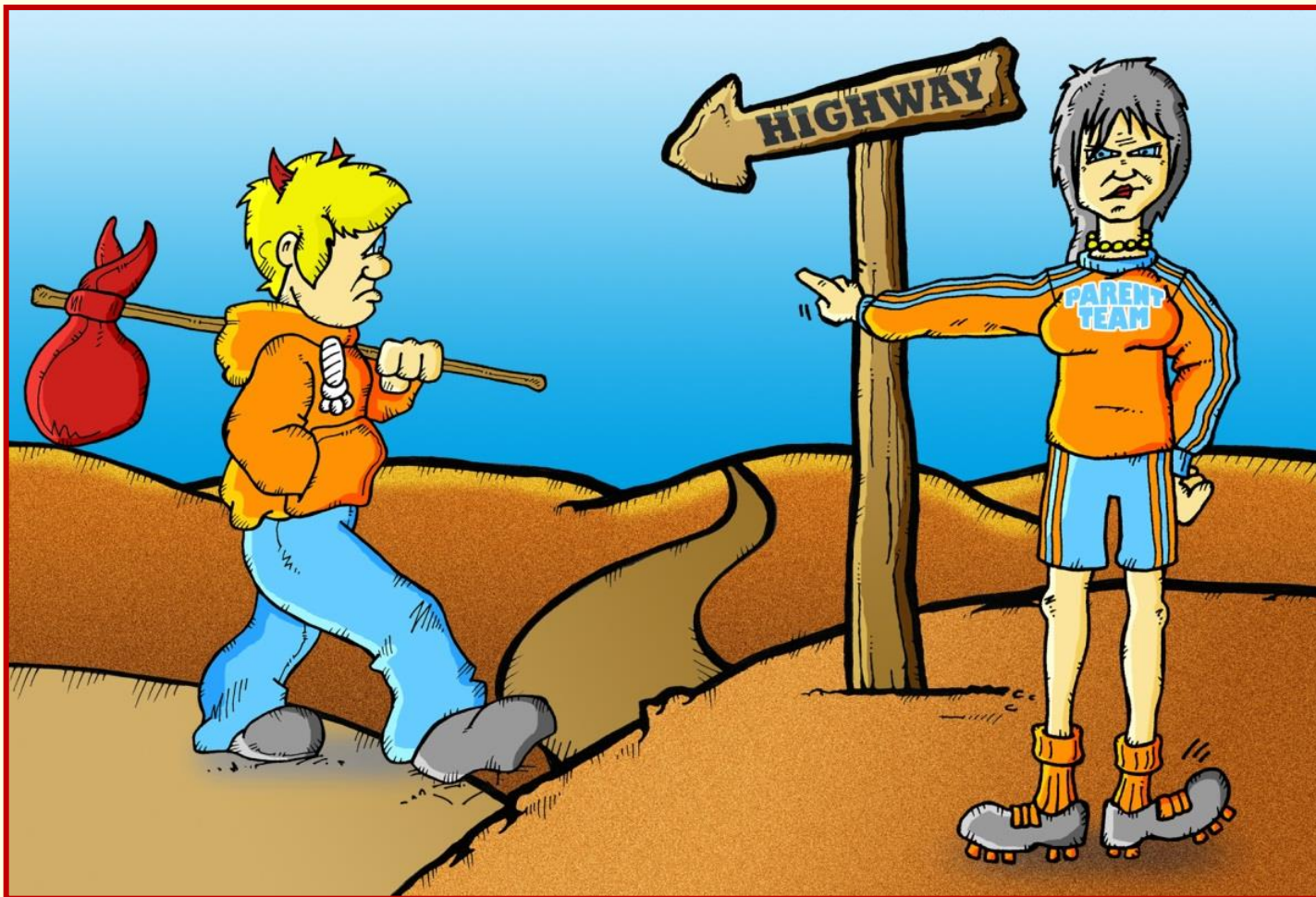
The occasional monster who is wrecking the family environment with their behaviour, is still loved, still mummies baby. The desire to nurture and keep safe remains very strong, despite it all. Sometimes, father is prepared to exclude the child, but mum can't stand the thought.

Remember - don't threaten it unless you are able and ready to do it!



In my experience, unless you are prepared to carry out this ultimate threat, you may be stuck with the unacceptable behaviour. Maybe there is a relative who can help out? Or an estranged other parent?

If you do choose to exclude the child as a short [?] sharp shock



Get the message right. 'We love you and want you back.....

.....when your behaviour is acceptable'.

Don't deal with issues while you are angry

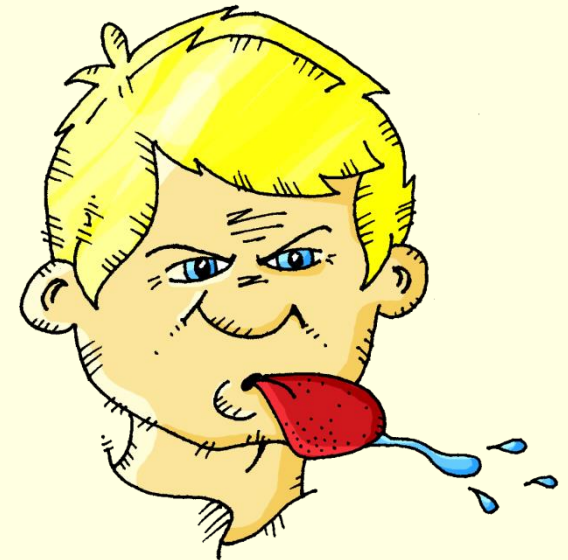
- The Anger Management Programme [pages 147 - 166] has at its heart, an Impulse Control Technique, a key feature of which is the concept of 'not now' [page 142].
- This means that you never react while angry, rather decide 'not now' and deal with the issue when you are calmer and have decided the best way to respond.
- Children are capable of 'winding us up' but how and when we react is always up to us.



Unless the child is doing something dangerous, the 'Not Now' Impulse Control Technique is an essential tool in managing the stresses of the relationship with the child.

If you do what you have always done, you'll get what you've always got!

- Maybe you are thinking, 'We have tried some of those things and it didn't work. It caused such a lot of trouble that we were forced to give in'.
- If that's so, it may be that the thing you have to do differently is - stick at it until you get the result you want.
- Be prepared for the uproar which may result from your confronting the problem behaviour and hold your ground.
- Which is best? Stormier water for a few weeks or months, or remaining stuck with the problem behaviour?



Remember the
theme 'Love you,
but your behaviour
is unacceptable'.

Next: Stress reduction and self calming

- breathe differently to calm down

- We are programmed by evolution to take a deep breath, or hold our breath, when faced with danger. If you take a deep breath now you will notice how your chest rises.
- When you breathe in that way you are sending a warning signal to your brain 'I am facing a threat, get ready for action: get ready to fight, run or freeze'.
- So when you want to calm down you need to breathe differently. This different way of breathing is called
'Diaphragmatic Breathing'

You can download the free Diaphragmatic Breathing audio relaxation track at <http://audio.angermanagementprogramme.co.uk>

This breathing technique will help you to control yourself when feeling angry

When you feel yourself about to explode into anger or criticism -

1. Change your breathing to Diaphragmatic Breathing.
2. Say to yourself 'Not Now' and hold back on your impulse.
3. Decide later [when you have cooled down] how to deal with whatever was upsetting you.

You'll handle things much better by allowing yourself time to cool down.

This impulse control technique is called the 'Not Now' method. It's fully explained in the Anger Management Programme:

www.angermanagementprogramme.co.uk

Use Diaphragmatic Breathing when you want to feel calm

Diaphragmatic Breathing sends a different sort of signal to the brain because it is a way of breathing we would never naturally use in anxiety provoking moments. It's a way of breathing which sends a signal to the brain 'Everything is OK. It's safe to relax.'

In Diaphragmatic Breathing you fill your lungs from the bottom up by pushing your tummy out as you breathe in deeply. This allows the lower part of your lungs to fill first.

As you continue to breathe in and your lungs fill, your chest may rise too - that's OK, as long as your diaphragm expands first.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

WRONG WAY

Inflate
chest first
and signal
to brain
'Danger!
Get ready
to fight, run
or freeze'.



RIGHT WAY

Push out
tummy to
allow lungs
to expand
downwards.
Send signal
to brain
'Safe'.



How to practice Diaphragmatic Breathing

It's best if you download the free audio version of this superb self calming technique, which you can do at <http://audio.angermanagementprogramme.co.uk>

1. Lie down and make yourself comfortable. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your diaphragm.
2. Slowly take a deep breath, pushing your diaphragm/tummy out. Feel your diaphragm rising and not your chest. Count to three before breathing out.
3. Breathe out fully, feeling your diaphragm fall. Pause for 3 seconds before breathing in again.

Repeat steps 1 - 3 for at least five minutes each time you practise. Practice regularly until you can feel yourself becoming calm as soon as you change your breathing.



Using Diaphragmatic Breathing to 'Anchor' a calm state

- An 'Anchor' is a physical thing you do to connect with a pre-programmed mental state.
- In this case, the Anchor is Diaphragmatic Deep Breathing and the pre-programmed mental state resulting is calmness.
- To set your Anchor, in other words to make the neurological connection, practise the breathing exercise on the previous slide while listening to a piece of beautiful music at a time, and in a place, where you are unlikely to be disturbed.



Problems controlling your temper?

If you want to.....

- Be able to choose what to do instead of reacting with anger.
- Be better able to discuss things calmly and handle 'wind ups.'
- Know how to defuse anger directed at you.
- Be able to release anger safely without hurting yourself or others.
- Be less stressed.



Key extracts from
the programme now
follow

.....please visit: www.angermanagementprogramme.co.uk



How do you respond when angry or hurt?

HOT RESPONSE

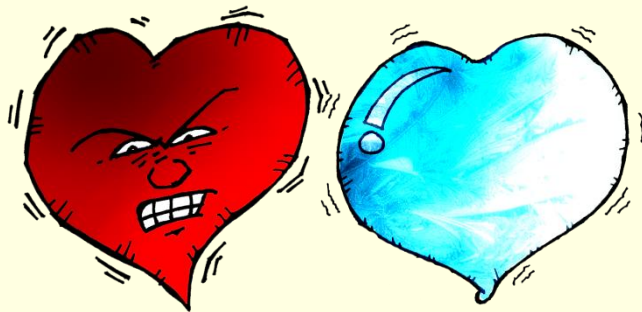
Aggressive, intimidating behaviour including verbally abusive rants



Your priority is to learn Impulse Control [page 142] and how to be assertive [page 65] instead of angry



Or a mixture of both?



COLD RESPONSE

Pushing hurt and anger down inside. Fighting back in passive aggressive ways including being icy cold with the other person without explaining why



Your priority is to learn to be assertive instead [page 65]



You need to learn to release anger safely [pages 159 - 166] and use anger reduction [pages 147 - 166] techniques



Next: Key extracts from 'The Anger Management Programme'

The Number One Priority of the programme is to provide an Impulse Control Technique to give control over angry and aggressive responses

The good news is that you undoubtedly have the ability to control angry impulses [everybody does!]. This programme teaches how to use that ability.

IMPULSE
CONTROL

IS NUMBER
ONE

1

PRIORITY

Step One: Make the decision to take control of the way you react

Until you firmly decide to change the autopilot way you react when angry, frustrated, annoyed, hurt, anxious or afraid you are stuck as you are!

Determination to change is fundamental to success in changing!



Step Two: Withdraw the Permissions you have given yourself

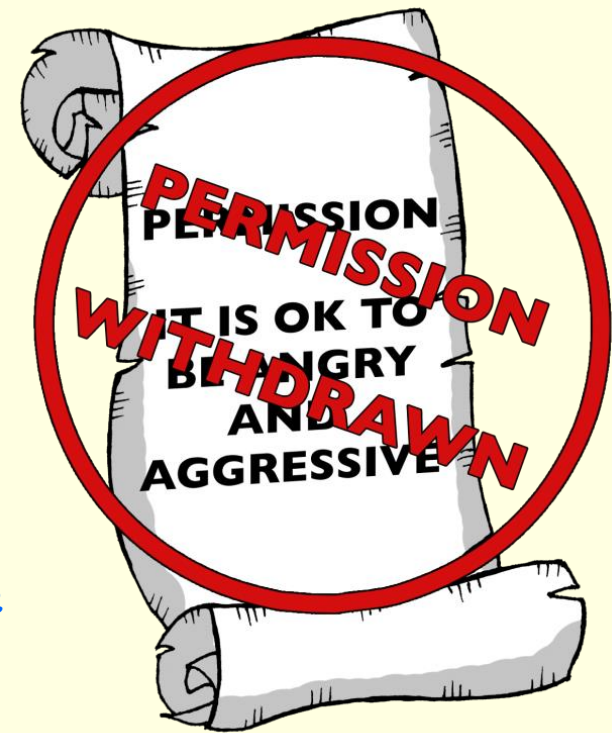
It may sound strange, but the fact is that you have so far given yourself permission at a subconscious level to behave aggressively in certain situations and with certain people.

You don't do it with everybody - so you do know how to control your aggression when you choose.



Withdrawing those Permissions

- A former client of mine, a lorry driver, was acting out angry impulses at home and his relationship was at break-up point. 'I just can't help it', he said.
- I asked him if he had any rude and awkward customers. 'Yes - lots'.
'Do you lose your temper with them?' I asked.
'No, I'd lose my job if I did'.
- So he denied himself permission to 'lose it' at work - only at home! He knew how to manage his anger when he had not given himself permission to 'lose it'. So can everyone!



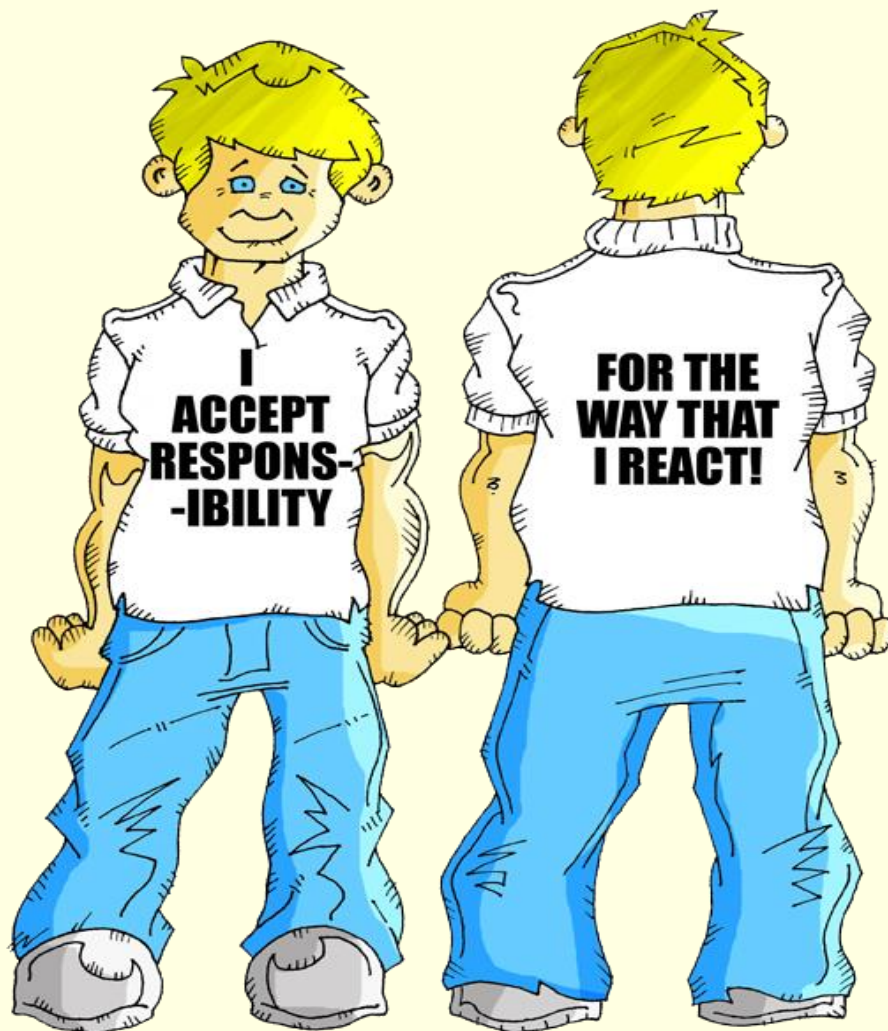
Step Three

Take responsibility for the way you react

Take
responsibility
for how you
react.

Don't blame
loss of control
on others.

Until you take
responsibility
for how you
react you are
stuck



Step Four

You need to get rid of at least two major false beliefs you may have

Major False Belief
Number One

'My angry response happens in a flash. I don't get a chance to control it'.

Major False Belief
Number Two

'People and things that happen, cause my angry responses'.

Major False Belief Number One



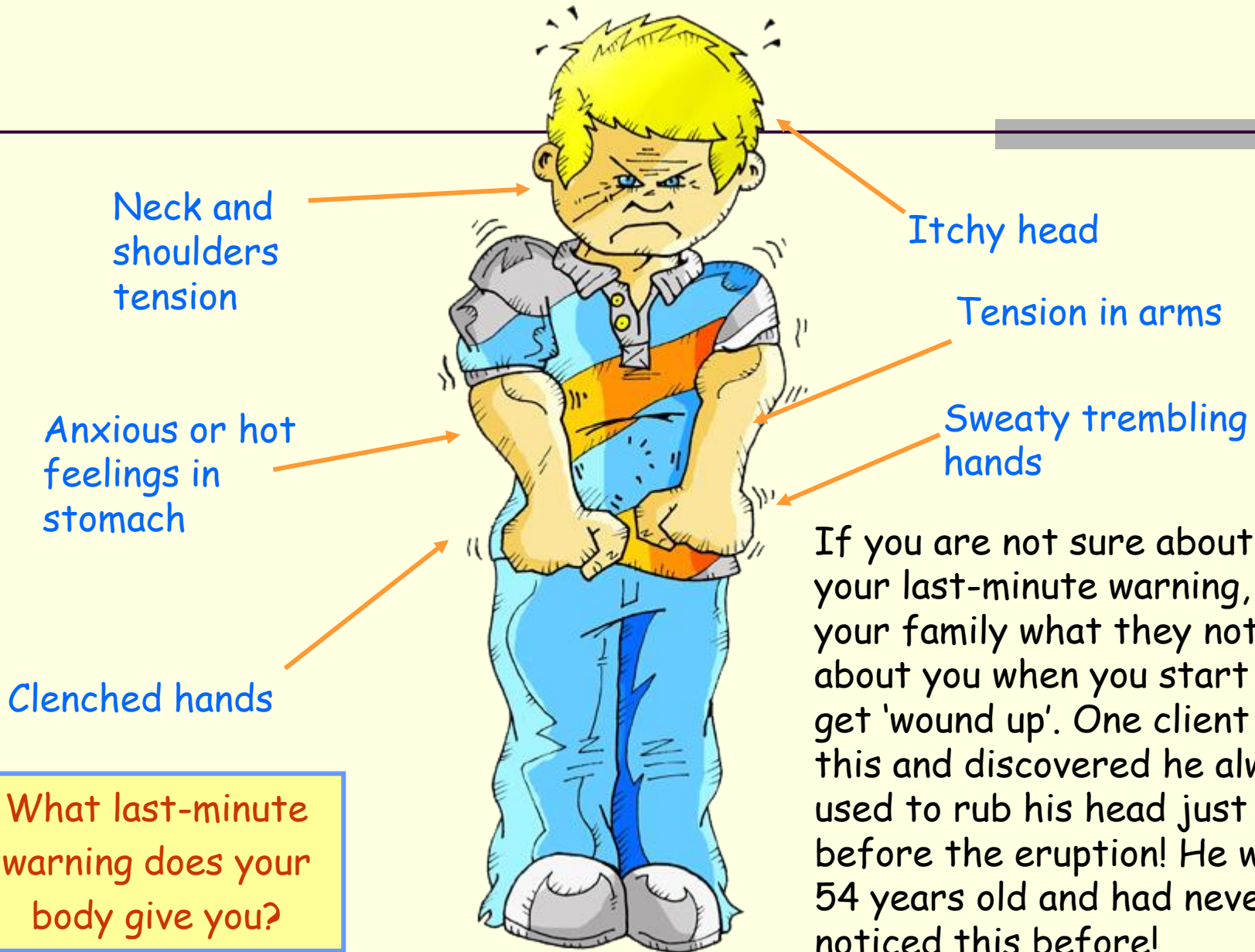
'My angry response happens in a flash.
I don't get a chance to control it'.

This is not true!

Your body ALWAYS gives you a last-minute warning when you are on the edge of 'losing it'.
You have just not been noticing the warning
- or ignoring it!

IT'S ABSOLUTELY VITAL TO SUCCESSFUL IMPULSE CONTROL THAT YOU
LEARN TO NOTICE THE LAST-MINUTE WARNING YOUR BODY GIVES YOU.

EXAMPLES OF LAST-MINUTE WARNINGS



Neck and shoulders tension

Itchy head

Tension in arms

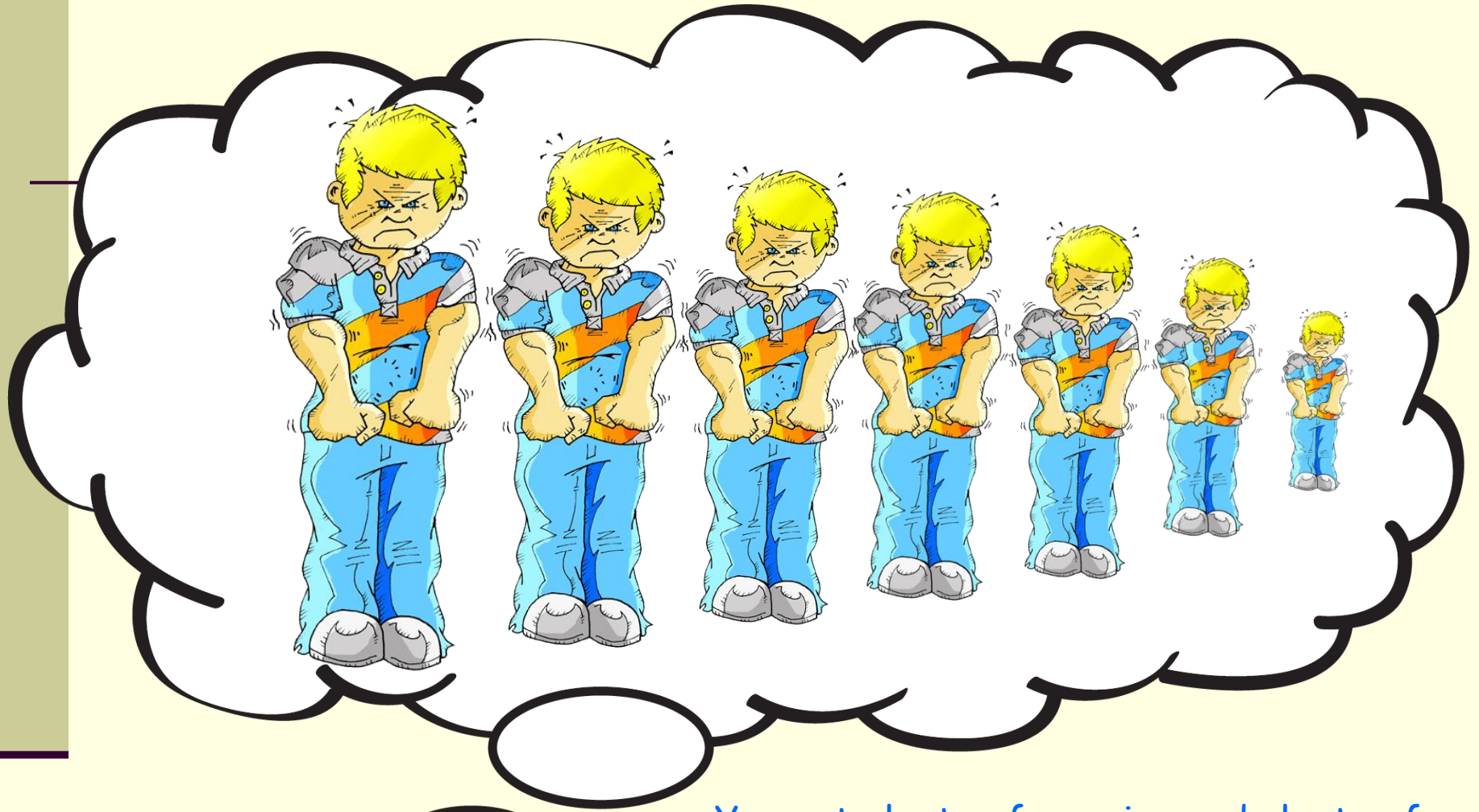
Anxious or hot feelings in stomach

Sweaty trembling hands

Clenched hands

If you are not sure about your last-minute warning, ask your family what they notice about you when you start to get 'wound up'. One client did this and discovered he always used to rub his head just before the eruption! He was 54 years old and had never noticed this before!

What last-minute warning does your body give you?

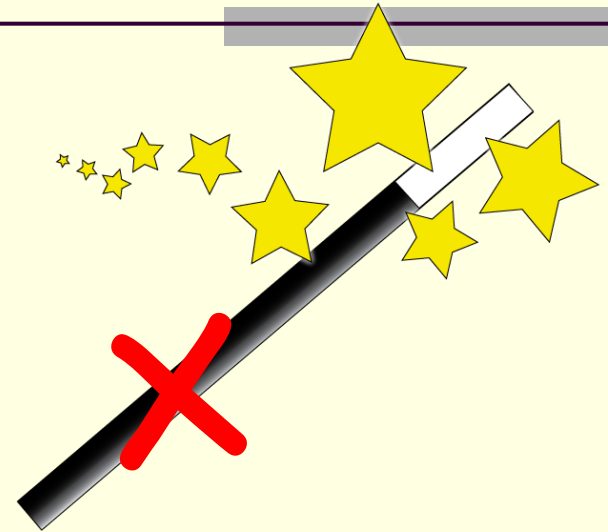


You get plenty of warning and plenty of time to prepare! The situations in which you are likely to react badly in future are the same situations in which you have reacted badly before.

Major False Belief Number Two

'People and things cause
my angry responses'

This is not true!



Of course, the things people say and do and things that happen, can give rise to angry feelings and can 'make you angry', but no-one has a magic wand to make you REACT in an angry way.

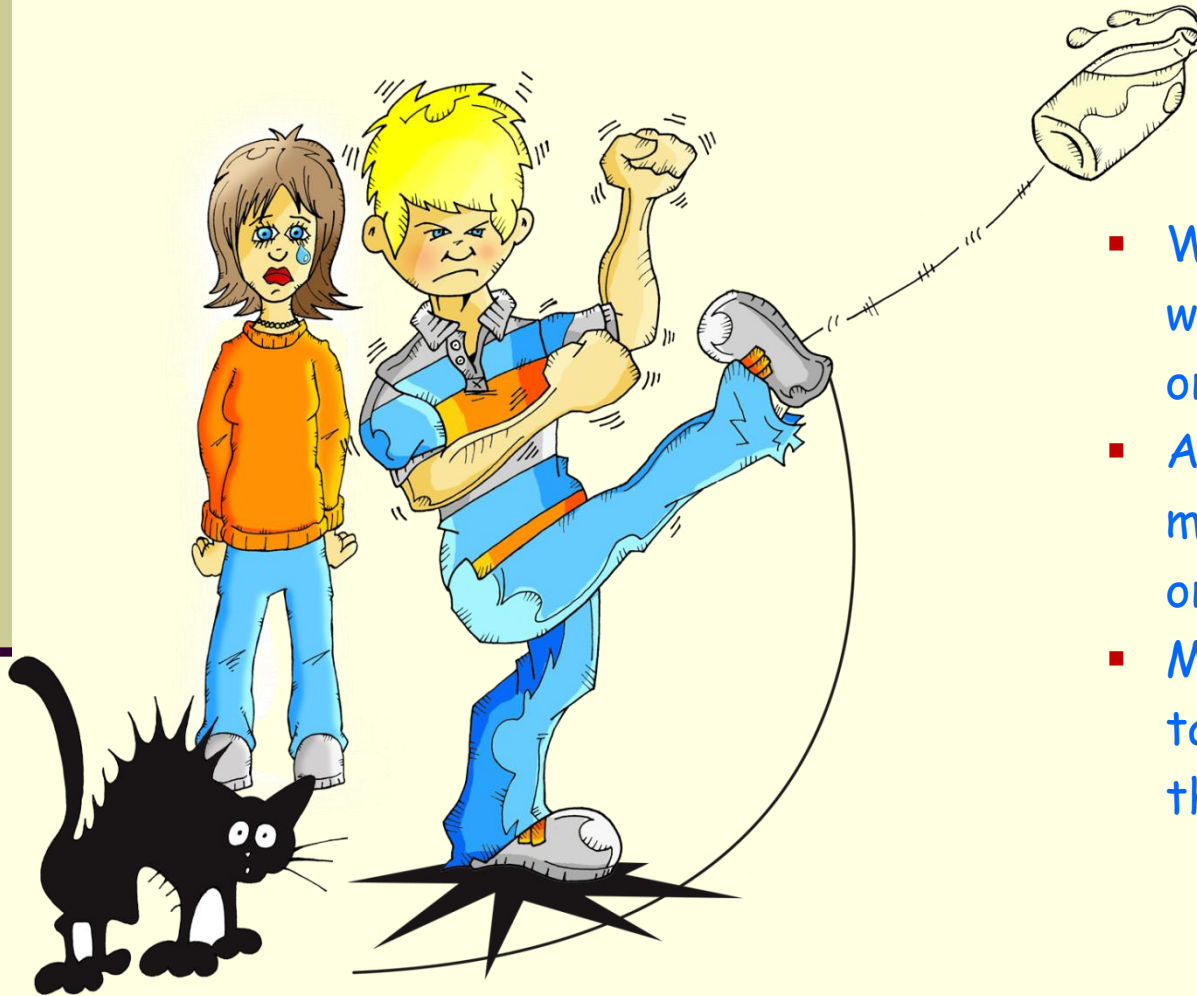
It's inevitable that sometimes you will feel angry,
but how you react is ALWAYS up to you!

Safe anger & hurt release is essential

- On page 28, I described how we store anger and hurt as emotional trading stamps, which we then cash in inappropriately with 'over the top' reactions to anger triggers.
- Unresolved anger and hurt damages sexual relationships [page 110] and is also a major factor in stress.
- It needs to be released in ways that don't harm yourself or anyone else.



Displacement - known as 'kicking the cat'- is when we take it out on the wrong target



- When we are stressed we tend to 'take it out' on other people.
- Anger and frustration must be released, but not on the wrong person.
- Maybe you sometimes take out your stress on the wrong person?

THE CUP OF POISON



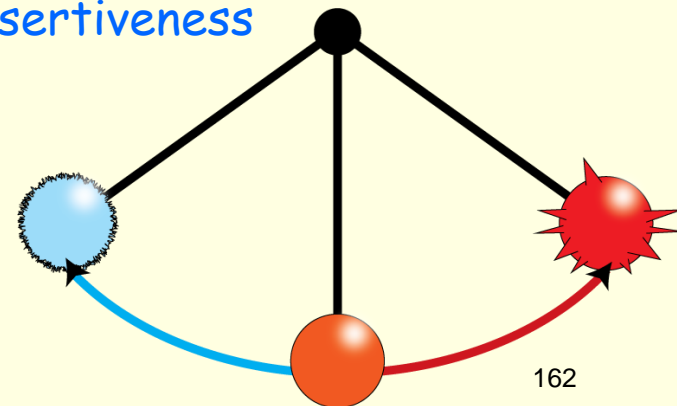
If you can be decide to 'let it go' it's much healthier for you.



- Hanging on to anger is like sipping from a cup of poison so that the possibility of revenge is kept open.
- 'If I let it go, it means they have got away with it', is a thought that keeps anger intact.
- That possibility of revenge comes at a high price! It's a poison which increases stress, impairs ability to manage anger and damages both physical and emotional health.

1. The assertiveness method of anger and hurt release

- The assertiveness method of anger release is about feeling heard, about not suffering in silence, about setting the record straight.
- The assertive option of expressing your feelings openly should always be considered, but sometimes it may be impractical or too risky.
- The danger is that the other person will react badly and pile on more hurt. Or it may not be physically safe for you to express yourself openly.
- If you think you can handle it, choose the assertiveness option and arrange to talk things through with the other person; or write and say how you feel.

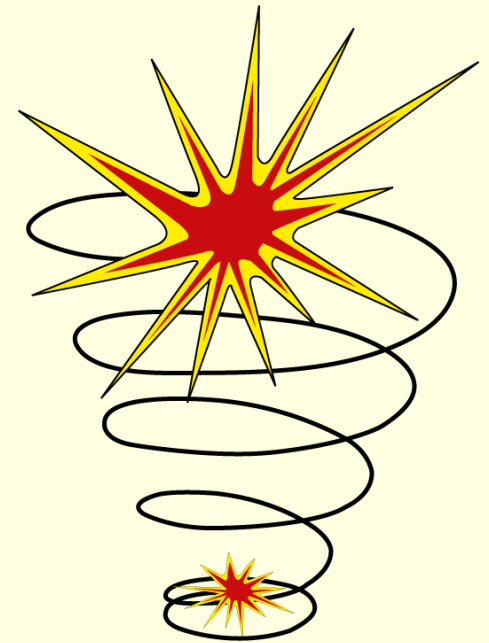


2. Write a letter saying how you feel

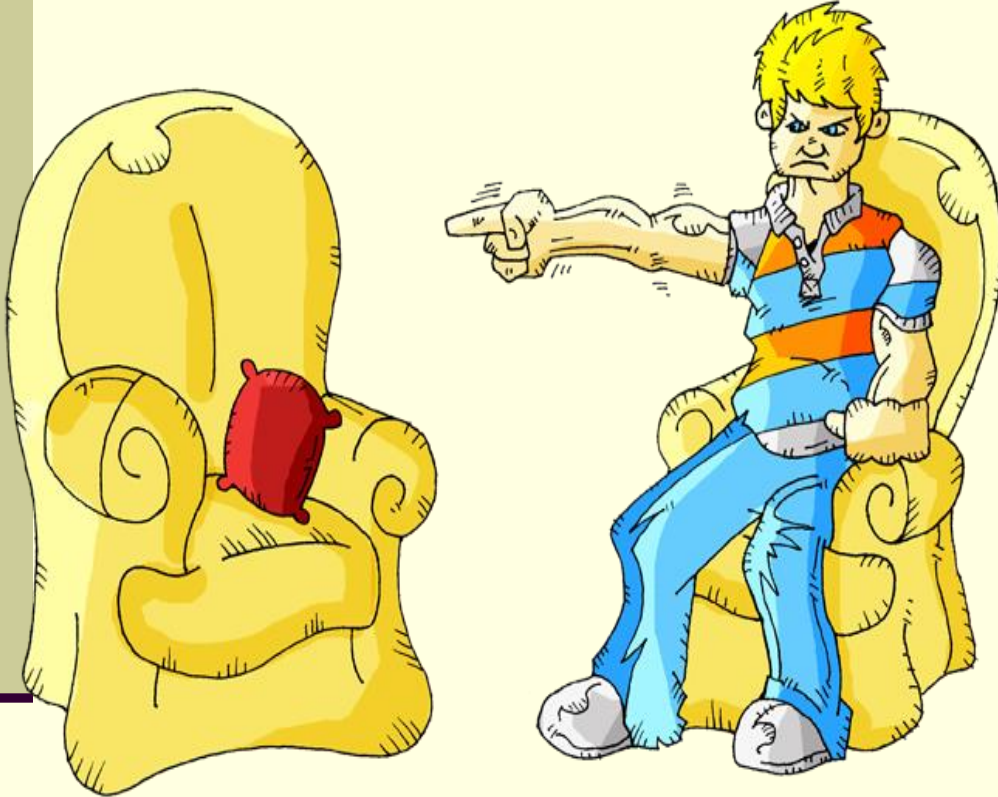
However, it's extremely difficult to write a letter which will not be experienced as critical and blaming by the other person. If reconciliation is what you hope for it, you may find that your letter will have the opposite effect!

If it's impractical, unsafe, too risky or you don't feel able to face up to the other person, choose one of the other anger release methods described here.

For example, you can write an angry letter you will never send [see page 166].



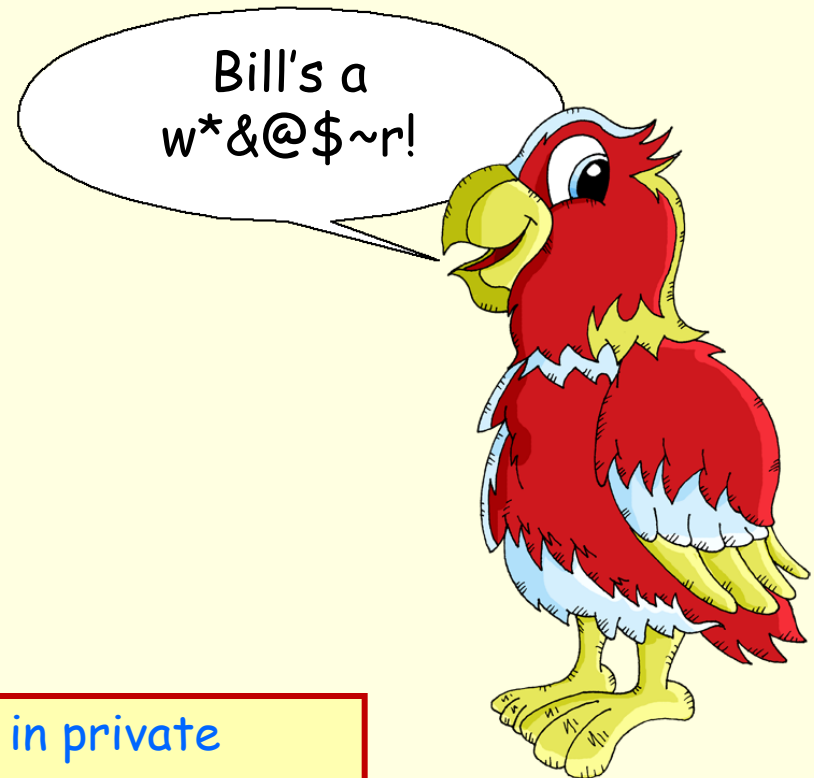
3. Vocal methods of anger release. The two chair method.



The Two Chair method of anger and hurt release has been used for many years. Choose a time when you have the house to yourself, put a cushion on the other chair and let rip. Say everything you would like to say to the other person, but to the cushion instead. Let your anger out: foul language is essential!

4. Ranting is a very good way of releasing anger and hurt

- Ranting is very good anger release, including lots of swearing.
- Take a cushion, pretend it's the person you are angry with and have a good rant.
- You can also express your feelings to a photo, to the cat or other family pet but, for obvious reasons, not the parrot!



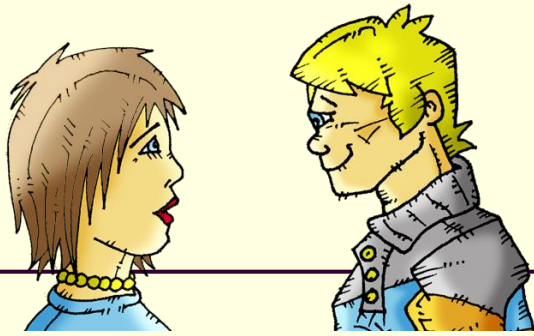
If you can't do ranting and swearing in private
you should consider personal therapy.
It's not emotionally healthy to be so inhibited!

5. Write an angry letter you will never send

This is the written version of the Two Chair method. Instead of voicing your anger or sadness, you write the other person a letter you will never send. The letter should not pull punches. You can combine the Emotional Letter technique with Two Chair work by reading your letter to the cushion on the other chair and letting your feelings flow as you read.



Artist Barry misunderstood when I asked him to depict an angry letter and a sad letter !



Happy with your progress?
Congratulations, keep it up!

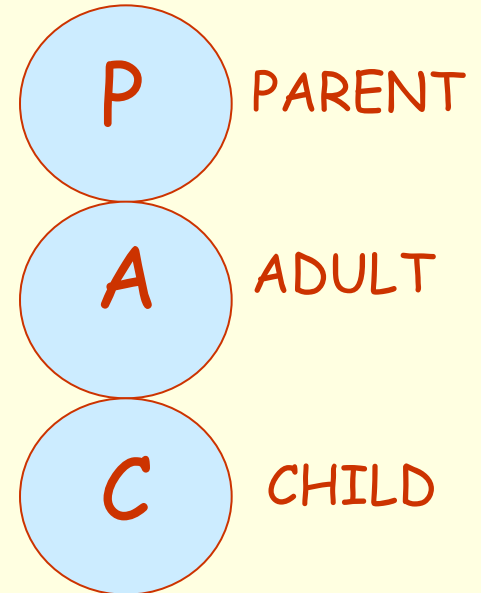
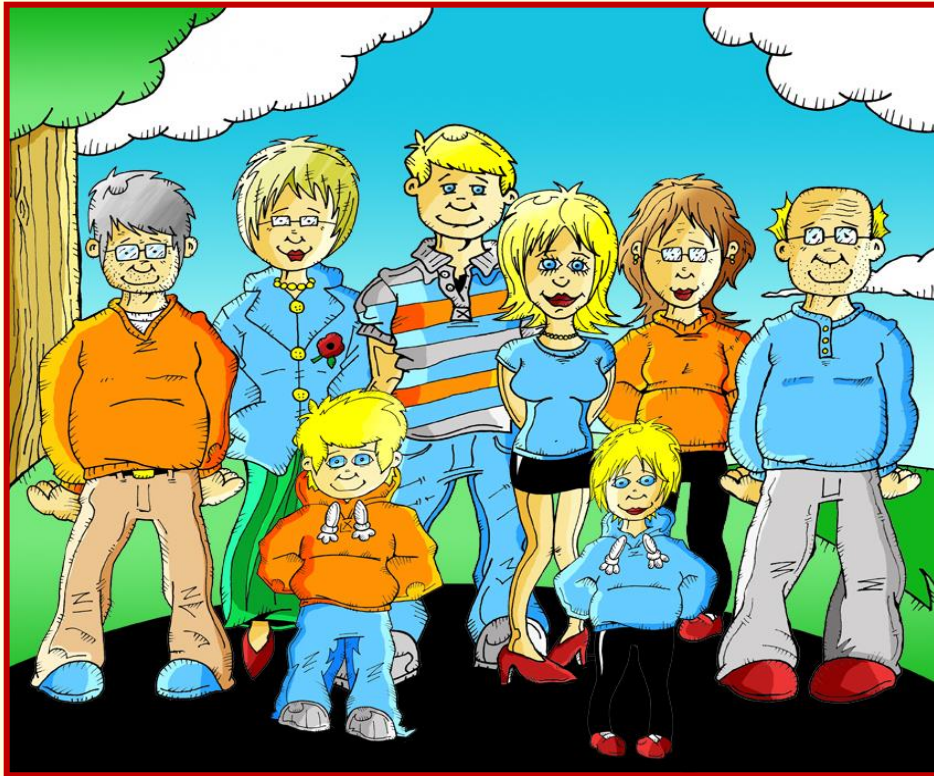
If not.....

You may need to consult a therapist to complete your work if, after using the techniques in this book, you are:

- Still experiencing relationship difficulties
- Unable to discuss things calmly
- Struggling with anger and impulse control
- Feeling angry or hurt about past events
- Unable to express yourself assertively.
- Unable to enjoy the relaxation techniques.



Understanding yourself and others with Transactional Analysis [TA] Psychology



OUR THREE
'PERSONALITIES'

Transactional Analysis [TA] is my main model for understanding human feelings, thinking and behaviour. I found my TA Masters Degree training, at The Berne Institute in Kegworth U.K., life changing. To read more about TA, read my book, 'The TA Way of Understanding Ourselves and Others' or 'TA Today' by Ian Stewart & Vann Joines.

My other books, cd's and downloads

To read about my other books, cd's and downloads please visit:

www.brianamartin.co.uk

Books [including cd and download versions]

- Healing Your Relationship
- The Anger Management Programme
- The TA Way of Understanding Ourselves and Others [see page 168]

Cd's and downloads

- Deep Relaxation & Self Calming
- Deep Sleep Self Hypnosis
- Controlling Angry Impulses
- Thought Stopping Techniques
- Releasing The Powerful Inner You
- The NLP SWISH Self Confidence Technique



Free Optional Reading Online

If you would like to read about:

- Listening Skills
- Empathy Skills
- Assertiveness Techniques
- Conflict Resolution Skills
- Stress Management Methods
- Emotional Intelligence

Please visit:

<http://selfhelp.brianamartin.co.uk>

OR know more about:

- Choosing a Therapist
- Personal Counselling
- Couples Counselling
- Psychotherapy
- Hypnotherapy

Please visit:

www.brianamartin.co.uk

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