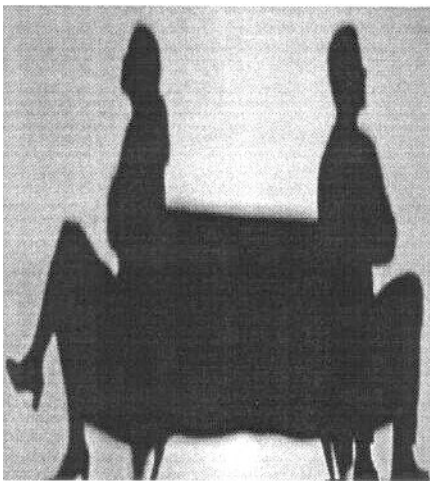


THE INTIMATE ENEMY

Like scapegoating, many marital or lover's quarrels conceal the real conflict. Arguments over money may really be about who has the most power or about not getting enough attention or recognition.



Honest, open "fair fighting" can confront us with the truth, stripping away phoniness and deception, and give us a chance to deal with the real problems realistically. But how do we do this constructively?

DEFINING ANGER

Most simplistically anger can be viewed as a signal that something is wrong in a relationship. Often we are angry because we are feeling put down, neglected, dealt with unfairly, demeaned, insulted or cheated in some way. The real problem is *not* the anger, but to *right* whatever is *wrong in the relationship*.

The usual ways of handling irritating circumstances in a relationship: Either being "nice" or being hateful - do not ordinarily change things. The suppression of negative feelings (being nice) usually means being weak, passive and compliant, which stores up more and more anger, which eventually results in either hateful "explosions" or in "emotional distancing". The 1960's approach of "letting it all hang out" (venting your anger) whenever you feel like it, is

also ineffective. This produces feelings of low self esteem, feeling unable to relate or guilt.



WHAT TO DO?

1. Find out what is really bugging you (your needs, frustrations, regretted choices, blocked dreams, etc.) and share **this** with your partner.
2. Use "I" statements to frame your feelings.
3. Recognize your "dance of anger" and adopt new "steps" out of the old routine.
4. Recognize both parties' efforts to maintain the status quo of destructive

fighting or passive withdrawal, rather than resolving the underlying problem.

ROADBLOCKS

Resistance is a common barrier to changing the anger “dance.” When desirable changes are initiated by one person in the relationship, their partner may frequently oppose the changes.

For example, if a wife decides to develop her own social life, rather than beg and badger her reluctant husband to go out more, the husband’s opposition to change often takes these forms:

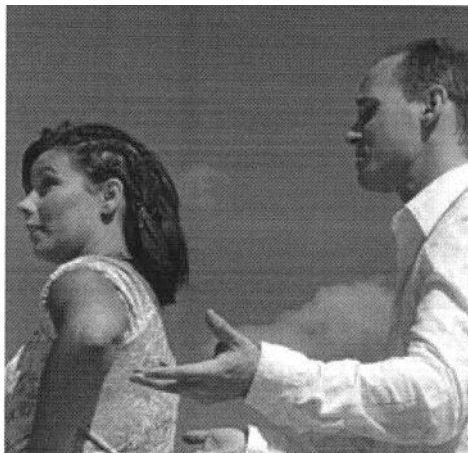
1. “What you are doing (or about to do) is wrong.”
2. “Stop being this way and it will be okay.”
3. “If you don’t change back, some serious things will happen.”

OTHER DANCES

There are various dances of anger.

There may be disagreements.

How much to socialize, spend, see relatives, watch TV, have sex, etc. - and anger



flares, but nothing changes. One may seek more attention and love while the other may be emotionally unresponsive; both may get irritated, but nothing changes.

One person tries to change the other person just can’t.

BEING YOUR OWN PERSON

The frustrated partner may strongly resist such changes. The willingness to be our own person and move in our own direction, is important, but scary - it stops us from expressing our basic disappointments in a relationship so the troubles

never get resolved.

Make sure your attempts at independence are not really avoidance of solving problems in the relationship.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

The major unhealthy roles we tend to act out under stress and when angry are:

1. The blamer, critic, or hot head or gossip.
2. The withdrawn, independent, or emotionally unreachable person.
3. The needy “let’s talk”, or overly demanding partner.
4. The incompetent, “sick”, or disorganized one.
5. The know-it-all: “I have no problems; I’ll handle yours” rescuer.

Do you recognize yourself and the people you have conflicts with?

Try to avoid these roles.

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