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INDIVIDUAL & COUPLES PSYCHOTHERAPY

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COUPLE'S DIALOGUE

Marriage may be described as balancing togetherness and separateness or time together and time apart or coupleness and individuality. Different couples desire varying degrees of emotional and physical closeness or intimacy. Generally however, if emotional intimacy is not present, marital discontent, discord or disquietude will be present.

We humans are born with an innate desire to overcome our separateness and to fuse or become one with another. We strive for this in marriage and we may achieve some success. But, for the most part, it is fleeting and we are saddled with our aloneness and our continuous seeking of futile avenues to assuage it.

The Couple's Dialogue is a tool to achieve emotional closeness, connectedness or intimacy. Some couples connect intuitively. They read each other's nonverbal messages and they keep discussing an issue until they are both in genuine agreement. If one spouse is emotionally intense, the other automatically mirrors or repeats back what the other is saying until the other spouse feels understood and is satisfied. In other words, they go in one direction at a time; they take turns sending and receiving and then they get issues resolved in a win-win manner.

Here are some brief guidelines for doing the Couple's Dialogue. They require accompanying oral guidance to be fully understood.

THE SENDER OR PERSON SHARING THEMSELVES

1. Use "I" messages; eliminate "You" messages.
2. Differentiate between thoughts and feelings. Always say "I feel ? or I am ?" followed by one word. Never use the phrases "I feel like, I feel that, or I feel you/we/I" because you can substitute "I think" for each of those phrases and the sentence will make sense. This is pivotaly important because "I feel ?" equals "I am ?".
3. Balance and use both thoughts and feelings but do not confuse thoughts and feelings.
4. Go deeper. Get to the feelings beneath the feelings. Get to the real or root or core issue.

THE RECEIVER OR ACTIVE LISTENING PERSON

1. Make believe you are a mirror. You take in what your spouse says and mirror/repeat it back.
2. You must have a positive, supportive **ATTITUDE**.
3. Make sure your nonverbal body language communicates your positive, supportive attitude.
4. Begin your mirroring sentences with “You” and avoid “I” messages. This is the only time to begin sentences with “you”.
5. Be sure to mirror back both the thought and the feeling but be sure to state the feeling first. For example, “You feel ignored” or “You are overwhelmed” and then the factual or cognitive part of the message.

SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. It’s real easy to skip the Couple’s Dialogue. Schedule it on your joint calendar and commit to it. If you have children, ask them to respect your half hour of couple time.
2. Sit toe to toe and knee to knee. Hold hands if able to comfortably do so.
3. You will probably feel uncomfortable with this more intense emotional intimacy, stay with the discomfort, it will subside in time.
4. As with acquiring any new skill, it takes practice.
5. Eventually, the empathy and communication skills you develop will carry over into your entire day and all your relationships.
6. There is more to say but I will say it rather than write it.
7. ENJOY!