

Building Respectful Marriages

The leading complaint among dissatisfied and troubled marriages?

"My spouse doesn't respect me or my needs."

By definition, intimacy is *the degree of mutual need-satisfaction within a relationship*. Getting our needs met depends on a LOT of things, not the least of which, is *how* we express those needs to those who care for us.

When mutual need satisfaction is not taking place, and intimacy is being replaced by resentment and hurt, couples are likely to distance themselves from being additionally hurt by minimizing risk. We minimize risk by becoming defensive, more indirect, more vague, and/or blaming and attacking towards our partner about what we need. We tell them more and more (verbally or behaviorally) about how they are *NOT* meeting our needs and less and less about how specifically they *CAN*.

The reason this doesn't work, is that it becomes MORE difficult to hear or meet another persons needs when they are expressed in an angry, attacking, defensive, or vague way.



Consider a metaphor comparing deep sea diving with today's pressured relationships. Imagine you are going really deep underwater wearing one of those diving bell helmets (you're under a lot of pressure!) Then, someone or something comes along and starts standing on your air hose. Slowly but surely you start feeling (air) need deprived. Think you might get desperate enough to start thrashing about and even rip the air hose off someone else in order to get your needs met?

That is often what I see when I first meet marriages that are need deprived. After an extended period of need deprivation - they have turned on each other - both starved of the necessities of relationship life - needs such as security, affection, being heard, affirmation, companionship, affectionate touch, etc.

And that leads us to the \$64,000 question:

How can I make my needs known in ways most likely to be heard by my partner?

The good news is that this is usually fixable - and the sooner the better! It's harder to resuscitate a marriage than has been robbed of mutual need satisfaction for a long, long time! But it is usually fixable if couples can begin to:

- (1) take measured risks to increase trust in each other,
- (2) get back to doing the things that built intimacy between them at the beginning of their relationship, and
- (3) learn new ways of expressing their needs in ways that create "win-win" situations. *Learning to negotiate* is central to this process.

This is where a professional, objective, and supportive counselor can be of help. They can help you negotiate your way through the many things in today's world that tend to stand on our air hoses!!

If you would like support in building greater intimacy in your relationship, feel free to contact us at Indiana Professional Psychological Services. And don't wait until you get hardening of the air hoses!

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