



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
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Let Go of Unfulfilling Relationships

I have dubbed 2016 “The Year of Letting Go,” and each month I am writing about a different area that I think you need to let go of! In January, we talked about letting go of low self-esteem. Since February is the month of love, I thought we’d talk about how to improve your romantic relationship by letting go of some bad relationship habits.

When I became a therapist, I had no idea how much time I would spend on relationship issues. Don’t get me wrong, I wanted to work with couples and families. I just didn’t realize how large of a market I was going into!

Over the years, I have noticed some things about people who seem to “get it” in relationships and people who don’t. If you’re struggling, or have ever struggled, with relationships, take a look and see if you can connect with the following:

It really IS all about you! (Who knew?) Your healthiness level when you enter a relationship determines the healthiness of the relationship. So, if you want a healthy relationship, you must be healthy.

Interestingly, we tend to be attracted to people who are about equal with us on the healthiness scale. We also know that every relationship can only be as healthy as the parts of the relationship. This explains the many times I have seen couples split as one person grows to become healthier and the other person chooses not to make that journey.

So, what is “healthy?” Well, here is my definition: “being” the way you know you need to be no matter what is going on around you. To me, it’s all about refusing to spend your life reacting.

Many people don’t know who they are, so they just spend all their time “trying on” the feelings of everyone else. Next time someone comes at you angrily, try refusing to match that emotion by becoming angry back. Instead, choose not to allow their anger to infect you. So many couples spend all their time reacting to each other, they don’t even know what they are reacting to!

It really ISN’T all about you!

(I know, confusing isn’t it?)

Here, I am referring to the tendency to take things personally. I spend much of my time in relationship therapy helping people put emotions where they actually go instead of on their partner. Partners tend to get the garbage of the day because there is nowhere else to put it. You can’t be ugly to your boss. You shouldn’t really say what you are thinking to the kid’s teacher/coach/caretaker. You wouldn’t want to tell that customer what a pain he’s being. So, it’s the people we love the most who get all the yucky stuff. The next time your partner is ugly to you, try saying, “You know, when you talk to me like that it makes me think you are unhappy with me. Is that the case, or is something else going on?” Even if an acknowledgement is not forthcoming, I’ll bet at least the thought process will have started.

Stop the standoff madness! Most people know what to do to make things better. However, because their feelings have been hurt, and they are too busy pouting, they choose not to. Here’s the deal: the only person in this world you have any control over is yourself. Begin handling things the way you need to. Stop waiting on the other person to make the first move. It’s not about who blinks first. It’s about who gets focused on fixing the problem REGARDLESS of who started

it. If you’re unhappy, try to make things better – go to counseling, read self-help books, talk to others who seem to be doing well. If your true efforts are unsuccessful, then leave. If you choose to stay, then stop griping and get happy about it.

If it were easy, everyone would be doing it! So many couples have told me, “This is too hard,” or “It’s too much work.” Well, I don’t know of anything worth having that came easily to me. Remember how much more the “A” meant when you studied hard, as opposed to the “B” you got without studying at all? I remember thinking, “I wonder what I would have made if I had just studied?” (OK, I was a geek). Realistically, the harder you work for something, the more it means.

Relationships are hard work. It takes energy to think about what your partner would like, and to follow through with action. It takes effort to talk to each other about the important things (and about nothing) instead of staying inside yourself. When the children come along, it would be much easier to parent the way you personally want to instead of working as a team.

Oh, but the rewards are great. We are social creatures. We need to connect to others. If you are currently not in a relationship, you can apply these principles to your friendships – they will make you a better partner when the time comes. If you are in a relationship, get to work!