



Awakenings

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Counselling and Psychotherapy Services

T: 01 492 0122

BETTER COMMUNICATION

By **Gillford D'Souza**

Counsellor & Psychotherapist

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The key to enjoyable and more fulfilling relationships is to manage the difficulties and obstacles that emerge in relationship effectively. Being in relationship, means we often have different feelings, thoughts, desires, expectations and ideals. The key to unlocking difficulties that might emerge in dealing with these differences is through good communication

CONTACT

Ask yourself the following questions.....

Do you make time to be in **contact** with your partner?

Do you take an **interest** in who your partner is, what your partner does, what matters to them at the moment, how they are feeling about 'life' at the moment?

Often partners talk about feeling 'bored' in their relationship – the 'exciting' days of getting to know their partner have passed ---they say 'I know about my partner now!!' This assumes that we remain the same person through each day of our lives --- It doesn't allow for **growth, change or feeling differently** each day.

Do you spend time getting to know the '**colours**' of your partner today??

The word **CONTACT** is a profound word – that implies the depth of really being in touch with your partner but also very simply acknowledges the simplicity of just that – keeping contact with your partner --- a phone call, a look, spending time together, chatting, touching etc.

'**Getting involved**' and '**being involved**' with your partner is an **ACTIVE** process. It is perhaps what continues to give life and substance to a relationship.

Being involved is a 'creative' form and life-force.

PROGRAMMED

There is no systematic attempt made to train us in the skills of relationship, contact and love.

We learn from our own experiences of being cared for and related to – sometimes these are healthy experiences. At other times we might grow up with unhealthy experiences of being related to. Unless we see or experience other more healthy experiences of being related to, we tend to internalise what's familiar to us as a way of relating /loving/ being in contact with people.

As adults we do have choices and can learn a new set of skills that could enhance our relationship skills. The key to being involved is effective **COMMUNICATION**

DISCLOSING AND EXPRESSING YOURSELF

Do you let your partner know **who you are**, what you are thinking, what you are feeling, what's going on for you? – often we use the word '**INTIMACY**' to describe just this – letting the other get closer to us by letting them know more about what is happening for us right now.

Often we fear doing just this as often this leaves us feeling 'vulnerable' – with a sense that the other could 'hurt' us knowing our 'underbelly' - how we really feel about things.

Sometimes in our experiences of being related to as children, we discover that it is **not safe** to reveal what is really going on for us – There are many examples of this; for example as young boys many are often taught that it is not ok to show or feel fear, sadness or uncertainty. For young girls, many will have been taught to show softer emotions and are not supposed to be strong or angry.

We all feel the whole range of emotions as fully developed, healthy human beings.

LEARN TO EXPRESS YOURSELF

Consider the following:

- **TIME** -- set aside time to talk, make the time to talk – remember the ad 'it's good to talk'
- **SHARE** personal information – Disclose yourself
- **VOICE** – learn to use the 'gift' of your voice – notice your use of tone/emphasis/pace/volume in your voice
- **BODY TALK** – be aware of how you use your body messages to communicate – your facial expressions / gestures/ body posture/ physical distance etc..
- **TALK** about how you **FEEL** – don't forget the importance of talking about everyday feelings - others cannot understand how you feel if you don't let them know.
- **NAME your feelings** – identify your feelings and put them into words to express them
- **CLARIFY your feelings** – saying I am confused / frightened / angry / hurt / jealous may be more clear than saying I am 'upset'

- **DESCRIBE the intensity of your feeling** as accurately as you can – e.g. I am irritated / annoyed / outraged / furious may be more descriptive than I am ‘angry’.
- **OWN YOUR FEELINGS** – avoid describing your partner as the cause of your feelings – eg ‘I was so annoyed when’as opposed to ...’You made me so angry when’ This is an important non defensive way of communicating.. and is often referred to as **OWNING** language.
- **BE HONEST** -- say what you mean , don’t say what you don’t mean – eg don’t say that you don’t mind when your partner doesn’t hear you , when it does bother you.
- **EXPRESS WANTS AND DESIRES -- REQUEST** -- You have a right to ask for things you want and desire in your relationship
- **RESPONSIBILITY** – In fact you have a responsibility to yourself and to your partner to be clear about your needs. You are the expert on yourself so no one can read your mind or know what you need.
- **MANNER** of talk -- Nagging/changing the subject/silence/being a know all / talking aggressively or too softly may all have the impact of further distancing your from your partner rather than bringing you into more ‘contact’ in relation to what you are trying to communicate to them. **DISCOVER** what might be a better way of expressing yourself that **helps you get HEARD.**

LISTENING AND RESPONDING HELPFULLY

As Mckay et al (1994) describe in their book ‘**Couple Skills**’ (pg 12)

“Listening involves a commitment to understanding and being empathic to your partner. It means putting aside your own interests, needs and prejudices long enough to see your relationship through your partners eyes ---- It says ‘I care about you. I want to know how you think and feel and what you need.’”

Real listening involves

An **INTENTION** to understand, learn , help or enjoy

An **INTEREST** in your partner – I want to know who you are!

RESPECT, DIFFERENCE, CONFLICT AND NEGOTIATION

As relationship unfolds, differences become more apparent and visible. Starting off in relationship, we often overlook difference or are afraid to own our difference as we attempt to be accepted and loved. As relationship progresses, we realise we cannot hide our 'real' self. We emerge more clearly. Often this can be a surprise to us and to our partner!! We begin to realise the differences --- in persona, beliefs, rules, thoughts, behaviours, interests, styles of being and interacting etc.

Often difference can seem threatening – how do we deal and relate to something different that we are not familiar in dealing with ?? Do we meet it with fear, suspicion and threat or do we meet difference with interest, curiosity and delight??

Where difference emerges, Conflict seems inevitable.

How do we deal with this difference??

Do you try to understand your partners view, thoughts and perspective?

Often we are comfortable with our own view and perspective, because we know this view, understand it and are familiar with the way it works for us. Difficulties arise when we see it is the 'right' view rather than 'my' view --- what then of my partner's view?? Can I really '**respect**' my partners view and respectfully engage in teasing out the differences that may emerge in trying to make a decision or doing something.

Can I see and accept this as two individuals with equally important and legitimate but differing interests?

Do I accept this conflict reasonably and calmly and as an opportunity to engage in understanding the other?

REFERENCES

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Couple skills: M.McKay , P. Fanning, K. Paleg ; New Harbinger ; 1994

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