

Relationships

Welcome to the Relationships Course

You have made an invaluable choice here, because our relationships are the 'stuff' of life. Get them wrong – and it can be a complete stuff-up. Get it right and you will experience a true fullness of life.

You now about to start first topic of this exciting *Discovery* series. Here's a promise. If you are willing, this series will take you on an amazing journey of discovery through the ins and outs of how we relate to people day by day. Not only will you make discoveries about others, but also about yourself – because relationships involve you too.

There is something very personal about this course – you will read your own lifestyle and personality into these presentations – as it can only be truly experienced first hand – and this experience can be yours.

You can progress through the series at the pace that suits you - that's an advantage of an internet course. But please do not leave each topic for long periods of time as you may forget and fail to finish.

The *Discovery* online Instructors are here to encourage you as well as respond to your questions and comments. They are available to help make the series as rewarding as possible for you. You can rest assured that your observations are kept in strict confidence and only viewed by your instructor.

To get the most out of the Relationships series, why not participate with someone else? We encourage you to invite the person in the closest relationship with you --- *your spouse, partner, child or parent* --- to do the course with you. But only if that is helpful for you and them, and they respect your ideals and those of this Course. Remember that relationships involve at least two people, and so it *is* exciting to be able to share the material and therefore understand the other person's thoughts and ideas - together.

It's now time to dive in get started ... We are sure that you will love it!

LESSON 1 - Love, Romance & Reality

Discover exactly what are the multiple advantages of being in a relationship. And what is the definition of true love? Consider the 4 stages of relationships from Romance right through to Resolution. Encounter the various disturbing actions that true love does *not* do. Experience one of the most beautiful descriptions written about the character of love written down nearly 2000 years ago and then use it to creatively reflect on your own love language and style.

Congratulations on reading this. Most people do more training for their driver's licence than for the most important relationship in their lives – and we wonder why there's such a road toll on the street of love!

"Happily ever after" sounds like an exaggerated claim from a fairy story, but a good relationship is one of the best sources of personal happiness. One study found married people are nearly twice as likely as single people to feel good about their lives generally, and that this happy attitude positively affected their work, friendships and parenthood¹.

If that sounds vague and hard to measure, consider a British study that found suicide rates per 100,000 people were:

- 9 for married people
- 17 for unmarried people
- 204 for people who had suffered unresolved relationship breakdown

Relationships can be blissful, or dangerous if you don't understand what you're doing.

Studying relationships even makes sense financially when the costs of divorce are so huge. One study estimated that every Australian pays over \$300 tax dollars each year towards the costs of divorce, compared to a mere 16 cents invested in marriage education. But by reading these booklets, you're taking a positive step and investing in your future happiness.

1. *The Journal of Marriage and the Family*, cited in "Marriage Partnership", Fall 1994, Illinois



Who taught you love?

Where did you get your ideas and beliefs about love? Your parents have probably been the most important influence on your opinions and behaviour.

If they have a happy and stable relationship, you've probably inherited reliable information (and, statistically, a better chance at a happy marriage).

But one popular educator likes to ask audiences, "How many of you would get married if you knew you'd be as happy as your parents?" Out of an audience of 400, usually only a dozen people put up their hands. Many of us need to learn skills and attitudes our parents can't teach us.

The media is probably the second-biggest influence on your thinking. Movies and sit-coms explore every possible relationship situation and, while we laugh them off, they influence our attitudes in subtle ways. But how expert are their writers about psychology? The Hollywood area has the world's highest income levels but also the highest divorce rate – 78% of first marriages fail.

Many stars are so good at relationships that they marry 4 or 5 times plus affairs! And yet Hollywood claims to be the dream factory, exporting its failed ideas about love to the world².

Although this course explores marriage relationships, its principles are also relevant to other relationship situations.

It does not specifically address arranged marriages, polygamy, de facto relationships or same-sex relationships, but all relationships have major common aims - fun, belonging, surviving hard times, communicating, resolving conflict and growing closer.

We hope as you read and respond to this series, you will learn something about yourself, the people close to you and how you can interact together to achieve lasting and fulfilling relationships.

Now let's get down to basics.

2. As John Smith, of *Care & Communication Concern*, said in a television commercial.

What is Love?

What a silly question! Everyone knows about Romeo and Juliet, Napoleon and Josephine, Homer and Marge.

Myths of romance are still globally popular, fuelling some 40% of book sales and 90% of songs: “*What’s love got to do with it?*”, “*What is love anyway?*”, “*It Must’ve Been Love (But It’s Over Now)*”... Everyone

Actually our ideas about love can be vague. You might “love” your grandmother, your spouse, your favourite ice cream and your dog. Most media portrayals emphasise sex and emotion, probably because it’s easier to show action and feeling on the big screen. But surely a balanced definition of love involves the total person:

- thinking (stable friendship, logical commitment, common interests)
- emotions (romantic feelings, intimacy, passion)
- physical (sexual chemistry, body language, actions)
- spiritual (deepest beliefs, hopes, ethics, connection to God as source of love)

Let’s start with romantic love (because many relationships do). It excites, fascinates and obsesses, propelling people out of the everyday on a magic carpet ride to a whole new world. Romantic love can be positive. It can motivate kindness, bring wonderful feelings that you matter and that life is good, and can make you aware of your spiritual side beyond humdrum life. It can also grow into a deeper and more realistic love. Yet there are dangers in romance. It can blind us to reality and cause an unwise choice of a partner. It can be mere escapism that does not stand up in real life. Its ending can cause pain and discouragement.

What makes romantic love so powerful? In their must-read book *Really Relating*³, David Jansen and Margaret Newman outline some of the forces that exist in the subconscious mind, that part of us that lies beneath the surface of our consciousness like an iceberg – and often causes *Titanic* disasters.

3. Random House Australia, 1989

What is Love?

This list includes:

- sexual desire, a biological drive which is great fun, but no proof of genuine love or compatibility;
- the need to pair, a drive that reproduces life in all living things;
- the need to be closely bonded, a basic human need that develops from our childhood attachment to parents;
- the need for intimacy, to know another and yourself, physically, intellectually and spiritually;
- the desire to feel whole and “completed” by someone else;
- the desire to feel “in love”, an expectation created by cultural myths and media stories;
- the wish to love someone, often without asking whether you’re making a good choice;
- fantasies about your ideal “dream lover”, which your imagination attaches to someone despite what the real person is like;
- the wish for a self-esteem boost from someone appreciating you. The old song says, "You're nobody till somebody loves you", but letting someone else tell you who you are can set you up for manipulation and disappointment;
- the desire for the elusive and unattainable, similar to a dog chasing a car and then not knowing what to do when it catches it;
- addiction: romance gives a "high", causes withdrawal cravings, and can cause dependence.

In short, anything on this list can feel like genuine love but is not - or is, at best, only part of the real thing. This explains why so many intelligent people look back on their romantic decisions and wonder who temporarily removed their brain!

The challenge is that romantic love doesn’t last long. (Maybe that’s why Shakespeare has Romeo and Juliet die before everyday reality sets in.) For every song or movie that praises passionate love, there is another talking about losing it: “You’ve lost that loving feeling”, “You don’t bring me flowers any more” (notice both those songs blame the other person!).

When the initial passion fades, you have at least three choices. One, you can swear you’ll never fall in love again and run away to join the Foreign Legion. Two, you can try to find someone else who will make you feel that way again, but this is not easy and probably won’t last either. The third option is to welcome the arrival of reality into the relationship, and see it as a challenge to personal growth. When you realise your partner is not an angelic supermodel with the ability to know and meet your every need - and neither are you - then you can start to notice what good qualities really are there, and to build on those. This can be the start of much more realistic love.

Stages of Relationships

Most love relationships start with intensity of passion, and then mature into milder and more seasoned stages.

Note: This doesn't mean they have to become drab and routine, starting out like a lacy negligee and turning into flannelette pyjamas. The developmental model of marriage accepts that every relationship is different, but here is one way⁴, to describe the stages couples go through.

1. Courtship or Romance. Oh the thrills, the chemistry, the desire to show your "best self" and ignore your dark side, the blindness to faults and problems in your lover and yourself.
2. Reality Bites. "How can you do that if you love me? We can't keep up the perfect act any more. Do I like the real you I'm starting to see? Will you like the real me if I show you?"
3. Conflict. "I want *my* needs met. I thought it'd be better than this. If only *you'd* change." The conflict can be open, angry warfare or hidden, underhanded manipulation and icy cold logic. This is the stage where many people walk out. Many couples believe conflict means its all over, but the wise or lucky ones see conflict as a challenge, and find ways to resolve their conflicts. (We'll cover conflict resolution in Topic 6). Others hope that if they ignore conflict, it won't affect them. But those who learn to handle conflict will pass this test and progress to the next level.
4. Resolution. To make it here, the couple has learned communication skills and grown as people. They're friends who have been through a lot together. They are confident that if more problems arise, they have strategies and experience at handling them. They can now enjoy the rewards of security, trust, fun, and comfort. They can also be deeply and truly romantic and sexy.

4. Adapted from Jansen and Newman, pp.16-18

Stages of Relationships

Other writers⁵, describe these stages differently or in more detail, for example:



You start off as an individual.

During the romance stage, you emphasise all the things you have in common. “Wow, we even like the same songs and the same football team, it must be love!” This lasts between 15 months and 3 years in most marriages (or a few weeks in a second marriage).



Usually one partner begins to feel a little suffocated by all this closeness, and tries to establish some personal space and boundaries in the relationship. (“Do we have to spend every evening together?”) The other partner feels hollow and unloved, and so starts to chase. This can make the first partner feel even more trapped, and make them over-react and push the other away. This is where a lot of relationships break down, especially without formal marriage ties. Some people have a habit of quitting at this stage, jumping back to the romance stage again with someone else.



During this stage partners start to think practically and work out an arrangement that works for both of them. This takes discipline and maturity, which is why so many couples spin out at this stage and have an affair or disappear into their work – but that’s the easy way out and not a real solution. This stage can last 5-15 years, depending how well partners can negotiate.



The partners realise they are mature enough to live independently, but they actually like each other and want (rather than desperately need) each other. They start to make it fun.



This is eating dessert. The partners have their stuff together. They work like a great basketball team that knows each other’s moves, and yet they keep growing and surprising each other. They are comfortable but not bored and passionless. They have a lot to give to the family, the community etc.

5. See for example, Susan Campbell (1980) *The Couple's Journey*, Impact Publishers, California; or Ellyn Bader and Peter T. Pearson (1988) *In Quest of the Mythical Mate: A Developmental Approach to Diagnosis and Treatment in Couples Therapy*, Brunner/Mazel, New York. Material from Doug Southern lecture, used by permission.

Love Does/Love Doesn't

Love Does

Accept you always
Affirm your goodness
Encourage you
Keep your confidences
Act kindly
Laugh
Empathise with you
Listen
Take responsibility for its own behaviour
Make you feel glad to be you
Value your uniqueness

Love Doesn't

Control or abuse you
Blame or bully you
Judge you
Use secrets and sore spots
Need always to be right
Pout or refuse to talk to you
Punish you for being wrong
Undermine your confidence
Use you for its own purpose
Remember mistakes
De-value you

And So

We've discussed "love" as a thrilling infatuation, and how that can mature into love as reality-based friendship and commitment with plenty of passion and fun. Time for your response (we don't want to do all the talking):

- Did any of this ring true about your relationship or others' relationships?
- What stage do you think you're up to? (Don't beat yourself up about this. Try to understand it.)
- What changes will it take to get you to resolution stage? How long?
- Does your partner agree?
- Where would you like to be in 1 year or 10 years from now?

Hopefully this gives you something to talk about. We'll leave the last word to an ancient writer who defined love this way.

Love is very patient and kind. It's not insecurely jealous or boastful, it's not proud or rude or self-seeking. It doesn't enjoy evil, but thrives on truth. It is always protective, trusting, hopeful and persevering. Love is eternal.

(Paul, The New Testament: 1 Corinthians 13:4-6)

LESSON 2 - What Do You Expect?

Many relationships fail when expectations are not met! Discover what the 3 different types of expectations are, how to recognise them and how to deal with them. Successful relationships are often based on clear expectations, as couples have taken some time to sit down and work through a basic contract together, so as to arrive at a consensus on what they expect of each other. This strategy greatly assists with building up great conflict resolution skills.

A newly married couple is signing their marriage certificate - a serious contract. Next morning they wake up together after a night of bliss and both start dropping subtle hints about being hungry, but neither gets up.

He is wondering why she doesn't take care of breakfast, because that's what his mother always did. She wonders why he doesn't make breakfast (or at least phone room service) as her father did on special occasions. Both feel a little disappointed and unloved, as though the other has broken some kind of deal. But neither knows what the deal is! They have not discussed their expectations in detail.

Different Contracts

Describing love as a contract can sound unromantic, calculating and legalistic. But in a very practical way a marriage is made of a series of agreements or contracts.

The groom probably has a few different contracts in his head:

1. Things he knows he wants and has told her he wants. (“Conscious, verbal”.) For example, I’d like four children. Perhaps they have agreed on this. Even if they haven’t, at least they have begun negotiation.
2. Things he knows he wants and has not said. (“Conscious, unverballed.”) For example, When I’m the only one going to work, my wife can do all the night feeds and nappy changes of the children.

This may come as a shock to her! Unless they discuss it first, she may feel used and unappreciated, and it will cause misunderstandings and possibly fights. Usually people hide these issues because they fear disapproval or anger. Other examples include:

- I will make you secure and you won’t need alcohol.
 - I’ll improve your social skills and take you exercising to get you slim.
 - You will earn all the money so I can be carefree and irresponsible.
3. Things he expects but has never really thought about or said (“Unconscious, unverballed.”) For example, my wife will be a great emotional support to me if I get stressed or down.

What if her father was a rock of emotional stability and she expects a man to be able to give comfort to his wife or children? The first time he comes home expecting comfort and she does not follow his script (because she does not know what it is), he may feel hurt and angry and start a fight.

Other examples include:

- If you ever get fat, I’ll leave you or have an affair.
- I will be dominant so that I feel strong and you feel safe.

What do you Expect?

The bride will of course have at least three totally different contracts in her head.

Often a couple is so “in love” that they enjoy a honeymoon period of bliss without tripping over their different expectations. They assume their lover is almost perfect, and agrees with them in everything. (This rosy view is even more unrealistic if the sex is good, which is why some people choose to have a courtship without sex so that they can decide more realistically.) In this stage, many couples ignore any signs of disagreement and don't bother to discuss them. Then clunk!

Contracts are often not kept because they are unrealistic dreams, because circumstances change, or because they are never discussed! Then emotions flare. People feel betrayed and cheated - especially if they feel they have kept their side of the deal. They also feel insecure about what they can expect now.

The trick is to get talking about your contracts as early as possible, before you fall over your different expectations. Ideally this happens before you marry, so that you can decide whether or not the contract is acceptable, but it's still useful even after you are a couple to clarify your expectations.

This is one reason why pre-marital counselling is a must. Even Governments are beginning to recommend and invest in it.

What can you do about the three areas?

- **Spoken expectations.**

These are being negotiated and are on the way to a solution.

- **Unspoken, conscious expectations.**

These can be like emotional land-mines just below the ground. It's usually wise to dispose of them safely before they explode. Despite your fears, there are ways to do this so that you do not lose a leg.

For example, when they had been married 25 years and the children had left home, she went to university, which broadened her thinking and made her want to be more independent. She worried about telling her husband, because she thought he enjoyed having most of the power and responsibility, and so she kept her feelings bottled up. Eventually a counsellor encouraged her to tell him. His response was classic. He said, "Really? Great! Do it. That's something I don't need to worry about."

- **Unspoken, unconscious expectations.**

These are tricky. Let's face it, you're not aware of what you're not aware of. You will probably trip over these. But when you do, hopefully you will learn to think deeply about what is behind what you and your partner are feeling. You can ask, "What happened in your family?", "What is it you expect?". You can listen to all those family stories and pay attention at family gatherings like Christmas parties.

For example, a couple had been married one year very happily, except that every Sunday morning she would get snappy about something. After some gentle asking, he discovered that her father had washed all her family's cars every Sunday morning, and worked out that this made her feel loved and looked after. She had never stopped to think about it - in fact she had never mentioned it, but always picked a fight about some side issue. She was so touched that he bothered to understand her, and that he washed and polished their cars the next Sunday. He cheated - he paid a carwash and sat reading a magazine, because he hated cleaning cars. But he was repaid by an open-hearted woman with a truckload of goodwill - he did not even calculate several memorable meals, romps and help with the most boring part of his tax return.

Contracts: Mastering the fine print

Often, contracts come with you from your family of origin. Every family has its set of assumed rules or family commandments, such as:

- parents know best and have the final say
- sick people get sympathy, help and control over what happens
- the youngest children get special treatment (OR the oldest children set the rules)
- the person who argues hardest and makes the other look silly will get their way

This topic will look at some detailed issues that may need to be discussed. Some of them may not be relevant to you, but check whether your partner feels the same way before you ignore them. Usually only a few issues from the list will be the real "live issues" in your marriage. You might like to set aside an hour with your partner to begin working down the list. (Or you could write down your answers separately, and then get together to discuss them.)

This should/will kick-start discussion that helps you understand each other more deeply. Don't worry if it takes hours to complete - that's time invested in your relationship. (Remember to speak the truth in love, and if an issue really blows up, take it slowly and don't hesitate to ask for help from a qualified relationships counsellor.)

Clifford Sager, the therapist who pioneered the contract theory of family therapy¹, suggests people sit down and discuss their expectations in various areas of the contract. You may want to work through this list alone while your partner does the same. Then get together and discuss them. This will take more time than you think, and can really open up deep conversation. (Warning: You may want to agree at the start that if one partner starts feeling upset, you will take a break and have some fun, or find some other way of showing you love and respect them.)

1. See Clifford Sager (1981) "Couples Theory and Marriage Contracts", in *Handbook of Family Therapy*, New York: BrunnerMazel

What Do You Expect?

- [Different Contracts](#)
- [What do you Expect?](#)
- [The Three Areas?](#)
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Contracts: Mastering the fine print

1. Expectations of the marriage itself.

How important are the following to you? How well is your marriage delivering on each? How well do you think it's delivering for your spouse?

- loyalty
- support in hard times
- protection from loneliness
- "happy ever after"
- peace and calm in a world of chaos
- available sex
- having children
- economic security
- status in society
- personal meaning

2. Expectations of your partner

- How dependent or independent do you expect to be in your feelings and activities? What about your partner?
- How active or passive will you and they be? Who should take initiative? For what?
- How close or distant do you want to be? Do you want to share your deepest thoughts or to maintain major privacy? Are you aware when you pull away? How should that be done? Are you afraid of being left alone?
- Who will have power? Both? You, delegating some to your partner? Or your partner, as long as they can be trusted to use it unselfishly for you? Do you compete.
- Who is dominant? If 1 is total submission and 10 is total dominance, where are you? Your partner?
- Anxiety. If you're anxious, should they be anxious too or should they help you reduce it? And vice-versa. How do you cope with anxiety and stress?
- Do you need to possess and control? To be possessed and controlled?
- Do you want to be romantically in love or just friends? How will you show love?
- Do you feel secure in your gender role? Do you need your wife to be ultra-"girlie" so that you feel like a man? Ultra-masculine so you feel like a real lady?
- Do you want your spouse to be a high achiever, sexy, physically beautiful, etc. How do they measure up? What is lacking? (Be especially diplomatic in your answers.)
- Do you have similar styles of learning, thinking and talking? What effect does this have?

3. Expectations about externals

- How similar are your communication styles? Can you talk and listen well?
- Are there differences in thinking styles? Is this ever a problem? How can it be positive?
- Do you share lifestyle aims and leisure pursuits?
- Do you fight about your families of origin?
- How similar are your views on child-rearing? Are any of your children on your side and against your mate? Vice-versa?
- Do you disagree over making, spending or saving money?
- Sexually, what turns you on? Who should initiate? Does one partner want more? Are your morals similar? Does sex make you feel loved and connected? Is it fun? Why? Why not? (If you are not yet having sex, you can ask these questions about the future or your ideals.)
- Do you share values?
- Do you share spiritual beliefs?
- How do you deal with his friends, her friends, and “our” friends? Do you have same sex friends, opposite sex friends, or both? Is that OK?
- How do you divide roles? Who will make most money, keep the house, raise children, manage leisure time etc?

Don't call a Lawyer

Let's not get too carried away with this contract idea. It does not mean that you are coldly giving this to get that. That's tit-for-tat selfishness, not love. Love is ideally a commitment to give as much as you can to the other person. It does not stop giving just because it is not getting for a while. In fact, in hard times real love gives all the more.

You are dealing with a person with faults (which you also have). Part of your contract needs to be a clause about forgiveness and ignoring some disappointed expectations so as to keep the other person feeling appreciated. Leave them space to grow.

Your contract will probably change through time. Your interests and needs will change, so you will adjust what you expect from your partner and your marriage. This is normal, and it is a good reason to discuss your contracts regularly.

Gender Differences

Even in these equalitarian times, there are differences in the way men and women think about love and relationships.

In his classic book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, John Gray highlights some differences.

- Women talk to feel understood and connected, while men talk to give information and solve problems. For example, she tells him all about some stressful politics at work. He butts in halfway through with advice on what she should do. She feels unsatisfied – she didn't want advice, she wanted understanding. Many men need to learn to listen this way.
- Under stress, men tend to need to withdraw to their "cave" (the back shed, the newspaper, TV sport), while women want to be close and talk about what is worrying them. Gray suggests women need to ask for support in a non-demanding, non-blaming way, and not to take it personally when a man needs to go to his cave. Men need to learn to listen without feeling blamed or responsible for solving the woman's problems. They need to communicate openly that they are stressed and need some "cave time" – but that that they are still in love and will be back.
- Women and men can talk different languages – and we need to learn to translate. For example, a woman says, "I don't feel you're listening." A man says, "I am so! I can quote everything you said in the past 5 minutes." But that is not the point.
- She is really saying, "I don't feel you fully understand what I really mean to say or care about how I feel. Would you show me that you are interested...?"².
- Men and women need different types of love. Men need: trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval and encouragement. Women need: caring, understanding, respect, devotion, validation and reassurance.

Much of the rest of his book explores these differences in emotional needs and communication.

Willard Harley's informative book *His Needs, Her Needs: Building An Affair-Proof Marriage* suggests that people have affairs for many reasons other than sex, but that a person is less likely to be tempted if their needs are met at home. He suggests men and women have different lists of needs. (Of course this is cultural and personal, so your needs may be different, but here is his priority list for your discussion.)

2. John Gray (1992) *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, London: Thorsons, p.61-62

Gender Differences

For Men

1. Sexual fulfillment
2. Fun together (“recreational companionship”)
3. An attractive spouse
4. Peace and calm at home
5. To be admired

For Women

1. Affection
2. Conversation
3. Trust, honesty and openness.
4. Financial security
5. Family commitment (be a good father)

Would your list be different?

Test yourself: Would your partner’s list be much different?

Ask your partner to tell you (gently!) how could you be better in these areas? (Make sure you really understand before you react with hurt or anger.)

LESSON 3 - Why Can't You Be More Like Me?

Everyone initially wants their partner to be "like them." Friendship is based on mutual interests. However, two people who are basically identical will struggle with the relationship. Many people are also attracted by their unique differences. Discover just WHO you are in a brief Temperament inventory. Encounter the four different personality types which will help you relate to your partner and your family of origin. An invaluable topic which covers the basics of understanding ourselves and the differences of others.

It's an old cliché - "Opposites attract". Being with a totally different personality can be fascinating, and can make you feel complete and balanced out. Yet in stressful times, your opposite number can react so differently that you wonder if you know them, and you might wish they could be more like you.



Personality Types

There are billions of unique personalities - as many as there are people.

Yet they can be classified into types, just as millions of shades are combinations of three primary colours. Psychology offers many ways to understand personality, but we will use simple classifications as old as **Hippocrates**, the Greek physician and philosopher¹. He described four basic types:

- Socialiser (Hippocrates called them Sanguine)
- Executive (Choleric)
- Creative (Melancholic)
- Thinker (Phlegmatic)

Using these names does not mean that only Thinkers can think, or only Socialisers enjoy people. It simply describes a style or activity that comes most naturally to each type. As you read the following description of their strengths and weaknesses, you might see yourself or others clearly - or, if not, you may want to take a quick test before you go on. (See Personality test). Some people are classics of just one type, but most of us are mainly one type plus one other.

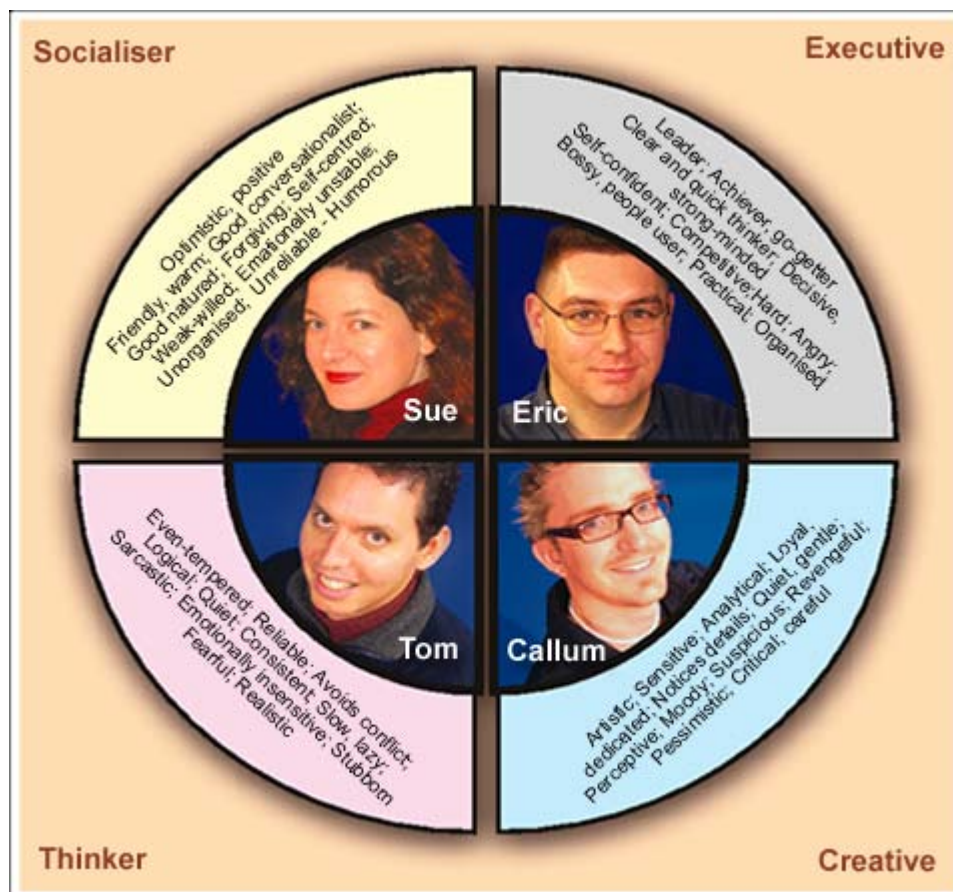
1. More recently popularised in the Myers-Briggs Temperament Analysis (which is more detailed, but congruent). Also in Tim La Haye, *Personality Plus* and Florence Littauer, *Why We Act The Way We Do*. David Kiersey and Marilyn Bates harmonise Hippocrates' ideas with those of Freud, Jung, Adler, Maslow and others in (1984) *Please Understand Me: Character and Temperament Types*, Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Company

Personality Types

Who Are These People?

Let's put faces to these types by imagining a party. Sue the Socialiser is talking to a large group of people who enjoy the jokes, the animated gestures, the exciting stories of her busy life. Callum the Creative sneaks into the room feeling self-conscious, wishing he was back at his computer creating an animation. Then he sees Sue and feels relief that he knows someone. He sneaks into her group and she gives him a huge grin which makes him feel accepted and he admires her confidence.

In another group, Eric the Executive is chopping with one hand to make a point about nonsense strategy, clearly in charge of the group. In Eric's group, Tom the Thinker is quietly enjoying Eric's ideas and scanning the room, observing what is going on.



What Do They Think of Each Other?

Sue thinks Callum is deep and artistic, and fascinating because he never interrupts, but wonders why he's so moody and gloomy. She admires Eric's leadership but finds him overbearing and has complained to him that some decisions are too hard on people. She likes that Tom is so patient and fair-minded and emotionally stable, even though he can be stuffy and boring at times.

Callum admires Sue's confidence and wit and how she always cheers him up. He finds Eric heartless and uncreative, but realises he needs his skills. He enjoys deep discussions with Tom.

Eric thinks Tom is intelligent and wise, but a little lazy. He thinks Sue is entertaining, and useful for motivating people, but too emotional and vain to be a real leader. He thinks Callum is weak and silly, but admires his skill at his art.

Tom finds Sue a lot of fun but a little shallow and wild at times. He thinks Callum is moody and illogical but quite brilliant and loves improving his ideas. He enjoys Eric's drive and accomplishments, although he prefers a slower pace himself.

How opposites Attract

Put simply, you admire qualities in your opposite which you do not have.

They are bold when you are scared, or funny when you are serious, or stable when you are moody, or wise when you are confused. You want those qualities on your team. You also find the different qualities fascinating, as exotic as travel.

Of course you are most attracted if this different person has similarities with you in their values and aims. Your decision to marry is influenced by many other factors, such as family experience, parental advice, socio-economic group, educational level, race or national origin and physical attraction. Yet personality opposites explain a large part of why people “click”.

Often an introvert links up with an extrovert. Socialisers and Executives are extroverts, which means they recharge their batteries by being with people. Creatives and Thinkers are introverts, which means they feel energised by spending time alone. Let's say Sue the Socialiser (extrovert) marries Callum the Creative (introvert). Early in the relationship, Callum admires her social skills, and enjoys the new feeling of confidence when he is out with her. Sue admires his depth and loves that he is a good audience. But after a while, Callum no longer enjoys going out so much. He wants to do what comes naturally - be alone or just with her. Sue feels bored and stifled, and can't wait to go out. She wonders if he finds her fun and attractive any more.

Often an introvert links up with an extrovert

He wonders if she loves him when she is so friendly to so many other people. Callum feels pressured and withdraws. The more they push, the more the other person feels unappreciated. He complains that her wardrobe is messy, and she sarcastically asks if he has anything better to do than keep his sock drawer in colour-coded order.

Every small issue seems to be loaded with emotion, another battle in a war of personal styles. Some relationships end here, because it all seems too hard. Other people are committed to making it work, so they talk it through, with help from a good book or a counsellor if necessary. Sue and Callum go out for dinner and talk it over calmly, not blaming or demanding but trying to understand and find win-win solutions. They agree not to make impossible demands that the other person must meet all their needs - sometimes she will go out with other friends while he plays computer games at home alone or with a close friend. They feel they can now be themselves, and each feels much more willing to give to the other and to make small compromises to meet each other's needs - sometimes Sue will stay home and do her thing, sometimes she will go out with him.

The key is to find ways of discussing differences that are non-blaming.

Change for Me

Trying to change your partner is perhaps the most common mistake in marriage.

It's so tempting! You feel you have the most logical and righteous reasons to change them. They should be more pre-planned or more spontaneous. They should feel things more deeply or be less emotional. It's for their own good! But marriage is not a license to chisel away on your Pygmalion project to carve your perfect partner who looks - surprise, surprise - just like you.

For one thing, that's impossible. A leopard cannot change its spots and no amount of nagging - or even psychotherapy - will change a person's basic personality type.

For another, it is arrogant. Who are you to change them? You have your biases, your blind spots, your faults. You are not God, so why try to re-create someone in your image? The more you understand yourself, the less you need to manipulate your partner into being what you want. You realise that you deserve love exactly as you are, with your strengths and weaknesses. And you realise that your partner deserves the **same unconditional love**. This is the point of the spiritual teaching to "Love your neighbour as you love yourself."² A belief that God makes people different, and prizes individuality and free choice, can help you value people more.

The attempt to change someone actually does damage. It says, "You are not what I want."³ This can pile shame and scorn onto weak areas of which they may already be painfully aware, which discourages their own efforts to grow.

But if you have the wisdom and strength to resist the temptation to change them - if you keep quiet and try to think about their good points with appreciation - then they will feel loved and secure enough to be their best self.

You may never fully understand them, but that stops a relationship becoming totally predictable. And you don't need total understanding to appreciate them. If you fell in love with a stable, thoughtful, even-tempered person because they rounded you out, it's hardly fair to criticise them later for not being as adventurous and spontaneous as you. If you married a dynamic, decisive leader, it's unproductive to call them unfeeling because they don't cry at romantic movies with you. Do you really want them to be just like you? If you met your clone, you wouldn't marry them in a fit. It's the differences that attracted you to your partner in the first place.

2. Moses in Leviticus 19:18. Also said by Jesus Christ.

3. Kiersey & Bates p.68

Improve For Yourself

Your own personality was probably noticeable from your earliest childhood if your parents knew how to look. It seems to be there before life events or personal choices have affected you much at all.

When you notice your faults, you have a few options:

1. Pretend they are strengths “I get angry when people are stupid – and that’s good because it makes them wake up to themselves.” This unrealistic view may protect a weak ego, but it means you will go on hurting people you love and will find it hard to get as close.
2. Make excuses Smile indulgently and say, “Oh, that’s just me. All great artists are moody.” But your personality is the hand you are dealt, while your character is how you choose to play it. Your character develops as you make choices based on your values.
3. Blame your partner “If you weren’t so pushy, I wouldn’t be so stubborn.” But maturity demands that we take responsibility for our own part in the relationship.
4. Give up on yourself If people at home or school called you silly or useless, you may struggle with these feelings into adult life. You may understandably be easily crushed, even by helpful feedback. But remember, a canvas is valued by who paints it. You can see yourself (and your partner) as masterpieces in the making by a very creative God who makes no mistakes and you are thus of infinite value
5. Face your need to grow “I will try to be on time picking you up no matter what else I feel like at the time.” This growth requires self-awareness and self-discipline motivated by love. It is also helpful to have spiritual values that encourage you to develop good qualities, and also makes you feel totally loved and approved of as you are.

Self-awareness means being conscious of your:

- Senses (what you see or don’t see, hear or don’t hear, smell, touch, taste)
- Feelings and emotions (basic ones are love, hate, anger, fear, grief, joy)
- Thoughts (opinions, values, assumptions, beliefs, knowledge)
- Wants
- Actions (past, present and future)
- How your body feels (frowning, tight brow, knot in stomach, light, loose)⁴.

All of these are unique to you. The more you understand them, the more you understand yourself and your reactions and the more you can be your best self in relationships, rather than just pretending to be someone you think they might like.

Many people try to find “the perfect partner”, but the key is to **develop** yourself to live at the **full potential** for which you were created. This is the **best gift** you can bring to your marriage.

4. Source: David Jansen and Margaret Newman with Claire Carmichael (1989) *Really Relating: How To Build an Enduring Relationship*, Sydney: Random House

Personality Test

We have seen that personalities can be loosely classified into four broad types, and combinations of these. Each one has strengths and weaknesses, but the aim is to focus on your partner's strengths so that you remember why you fell in love with them at first, and so they can grow in an atmosphere of love.

Who are you?

It's helpful to know yourself, try to perform a personality test.

LESSON 4 - Communication: How Misunderstandings Happen

Communication seems so simple at first. Then reality sets into the relationship. *Why does talking and listening have to be so hard?* Everytime we speak there are at least 4 versions of our words that have to be evaluated: 1. What we meant to say. 2. What we actually said. 3. What the other person heard us say. 4. What the other person *interpreted* our words to mean. Learn how feedback is the way we check out if our interpretation is correct. The way we listen will also determine the future direction of the whole relationship.

Everyone knows a good relationship is built on communication. But how well do we do?

Every time you open your mouth, there are at least four versions:

1. What you meant to say. "Wow, you are gorgeous. I love you."
2. What you actually said. "Wow, you look great today. That dress really suits you."
3. What the other person thinks they heard. "You look great today in that dress."
4. What the other person interpreted it to mean. "You look fat other days in other dresses."

That rather extreme example shows someone "filtering" a message through what is in their head. We all have filters: our mood, our context, our life experience, our self-esteem. That is why it's so important not to react before checking what you think you heard: "Are you saying I'm fat?" He says, "Fat? No!" He could add, "Where on earth did you get that idea? Listen to me, not the voices in your head!" But he would be much wiser simply to restate his message. "I meant you're gorgeous. Especially today. And I love you."

The more you know yourself, the more you can remove your filters and hear clearly. For example, "I was called Fatty at school, which is why I sometimes hear you wrongly. But I know I'm not fat, and I'm working on my self-esteem." This helps the other person know you. "Ah ... now that I know that, how can I help?"



Paraphrasing

In tricky or emotionally charged situations, it can be useful to use paraphrasing - that is, checking that you have understood by re-stating the message back to the speaker in your own words.

If he says, "How could you leave me alone at that party with those ghastly, boring people? I've told you I hate that."

Feedback is the way to check out if you really understand, rather than assume

And then I find you talking to an old boyfriend!!!” She would be wise to say, “Can I check that I understand? You’re angry because you felt bored at the party, even though you feel you’ve told me before, and because you feel jealous of my old boyfriend. Correct?”” He now has the chance to clarify anything. “I wasn’t just bored. I was afraid of those backstabbers.” She can now give feedback on that. “So their nastiness worries you.” Now at least he feels listened to and understood. Now it’s her turn to speak. “I didn’t realise they were a problem to you. I guess I figured you could tie them in knots.” He might butt in: “How can you say you didn’t know. I’ve told you before!” (Actually he should have listened to her whole story, and checked he had it clear, before swooping on a detail.) She could say, “Have you? Sorry I didn’t get that message. But now I understand. And don’t worry - that creep I went out with once is now a Managing Director and I want their business.”

Feedback is the way to check out if you really understand, rather than assume. “You seem to be frowning. Have I offended you?” You might get, “Yes, what did you mean by...?” Or, “Oh, no. I can feel a migraine coming on.” You can also ask the other person to check they’ve understood your message, especially if you feel it’s important, emotionally heavy or tricky to understand. This form of feedback may seem unnatural at first, but it works and with time will become natural.

Communication: How Misunderstandings Happen

- [Paraphrasing](#)
- [Good Listening](#)
- [Listening](#)
- [What Are You Trying To achieve?](#)
- [Application Questions](#)

Good Listening

Why don't people listen? Huh? I said, Why ... Aaargh!

Some people never seem to hear what you say. How do you feel when it seems your words are bouncing off? Do you ever do that to people?

Try these for the top few irritating attitudes:

- I know what you're going to say... (Message: You're predictable and boring.)
- My answer will be... (Message: My reply will be more important than your chatter.)
- Yeah, yeah, now let me talk. (Message: You're not really important. It's all about me.)
- Hurry up. (What, you have a cab waiting? Let it go.)
- My mind is made up. Don't confuse me with the facts.
- I know what you should do. (What, before you've really heard the situation?)
- I don't want to know. (I have much more important things to do. I think you're silly or beneath me.)

Good listening

Listen, it's not enough just to listen. You have to let your partner feel heard. How do you let them know you're listening?

- Empathy Use your imagination to see things from their point of view and try to understand their feelings.
- Acceptance Even if you don't agree with some of their ideas or actions, accept them as people, and be tolerant and forgiving of their mistakes.
- Clarifying what you think you heard
- Acknowledge what they've said, even if you don't agree "I see your point about Joe. However..." "Thanks for telling me your take on things. I see it differently..."
- Keep quiet at times so they can think Don't tailgate their last word with your first - it's stressful.
- Keep focus Your brain is faster than their mouth, even if they are a horse race commentator. If you try to time-share your brain and use the extra capacity on something else (like planning your share portfolio), you are not really focussing on them. You might be found out when they say, "What do you think about it?", and you realise you haven't been listening for the last two minutes.

Your listening style

How do you talk in different situations?¹.

- Conversational: “And then I said to her...” This is for story-telling, joking, telling news and chatting. It’s safe and friendly and it helps put everyone at ease by staying on safe topics. But it does not allow deep, personal sharing about inner feelings and ideas.
- Light Control: “I’d suggest you...” “Your best bet is to...” This is for advice, teaching, directing or selling. It can be helpful, but can come across pushy, as though you know better, and can create tension and power struggles, and can even suggest you are better than they are.
- Heavy Control: “Listen, you should...”, “You have to...”, “Don’t ever...”, “Oh, come on...” This sounds like blaming, accusing, demanding, whining or warning. It can sound aggressive. It may be fine for an emergency or to bring heavy conflict into the open, but it shows little respect and shuts down communication. People who use it a lot are showing that they have low self-esteem and are trying to feel strong and good by taking power over others.
- Open and Straight: “How do you feel about...?”, “I feel worried that...”, “My view is...” This is a friendly offer to tell you how I see it, and to listen to how you see it and try to understand. It makes the other person feel like a respected equal, and you like a reasonable and thoughtful human being. It allows you to keep calm, to focus only on thoughts when that is safer, and to invite people to open up their feelings where appropriate. It is not pushy, but exploratory (“I think...”). It is real and accepting and lessens tension. It is the “calm, sweet voice of reason” that builds honest, trusting relationships and grows real people.

1. Outline based on David Jansen and Margaret Newman (1989) *Really Relating: How To Build an Enduring Relationship*, Sydney: Random House, pp.109-117

Listening: What are you trying to achieve?

Why do you talk? Unless you are on a mission to set the world straight (in which case check your self-esteem), you communicate because you want to know people and be known, and want to like and be liked. But how deeply?

It's useful to think of levels of communication, and the level you use depends on the occasion, the person, and the stage or type of relationship.

- **Clichés**

For example, "Nice day." "How are you?"

This type of chat recognises another person and lets you size each other up without any commitment - you can tell a lot about a person from two words if you're paying attention to tone, body language, facial expressions etc. You can decide whether to keep talking.

- **Facts**

For example, "The meeting is running overtime." "We've won the cricket."

This is suitable for everyday business. It may lead to more conversation, but it's still safe and impersonal so no-one is committed to talk more or wear their heart on their sleeve and risk rejection. Many men feel safest at this level.

- **Opinions and Judgments**

For example, "I love Robin Williams movies."

This is starting to reveal more about you. This is a risk - if they disagree with an opinion based on your core values, will that feel like a rejection of you? Many marriages get stuck here. Talking at this level still feels fairly safe, but couples who do not venture deeper into feelings will eventually find themselves bored with "nothing left to talk about". Of course you need to go carefully past this point so that each feels understood and able to be honest.

- **Feelings**

For example, "I'm disappointed with the marks I got." "I'm so proud of my son's award."
"My boss is driving me nuts."

This is getting near your heart, revealing your struggles, victories, fears, anxieties and highs. If the listener acknowledges your emotions, you will feel understood. If they miss

the point or disagree, you may feel a little hurt, and want to cover up. Even in a world of celebrity bare-all interviews, sharing real feelings is a risk - but the reward is you will know another person, and be known yourself. One writer has described heaven as the place where we “know fully and are fully known” and yet loved².

- **Needs & Inner Self**

I might have been a bit stupid. **[Accept me.]**

They’re planning cutbacks at work and I’m really worried. **[Understand my fear.]**

I hate seeing children in pain at work. **[Comfort me.]**

I live for my children and my music. **[Know me.]**

This is the real you. It reveals your strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, moods, traits. The more you trust your partner, the more you can open up and get really close to the person. If you’ve ever been really listened to and understood, you know how good it feels. It also feels good to be able to give that to the person you love, and see them relax and shine. It takes time and patience. This is intimacy. There is no need to hide, or put an emotional fig leaf over some part of yourself you think is unlovable. In the old story of love in paradise, Adam and Eve are totally naked together “and they knew no shame”.

2. Paul, The New Testament: [1 Corinthians 13:12](#)

What Are You Trying To Achieve?

Obviously you are allowed to keep some secrets if you choose. There are some things that no partner should have to deal with, and which can destroy a relationship:

- “Truth is you're fat is off-putting, and your skin is blotchy. You're not very desirable.”
- “I only married you because my parents pushed me.”

One writer said the ideal is “speaking the truth in love”³. Even if those statements are true, there's not much love in them.

There are some things that no partner should have to deal with, and which can destroy a relationship.

For successful conversation, we need the ability to move from one level to another as appropriate to the occasion. Some relationships will never get very deep, and that's fine. It's hardly expected that you'll walk into a sales meeting and get straight to level 5. A man might never get past level 3 with a friend he has known for years. A woman might go straight through level 3 opinions to level 4 feelings after 10 minutes with a new hairdresser. In a marriage, a lot of everyday conversation might be at levels 2 and 3. But if you get stuck there, you will feel lonely and bored.

It is well known that most women find feelings easier to discuss than most men do. Yet men who become emotionally intelligent and competent are more likely not just to have happy relationships across the board, but also to achieve more highly at work and be generally happier. Having a high “EQ” (emotional IQ) doesn't mean you are more emotional and sob down your sleeve whenever you see a daisy. It means you can read other people's emotions as well as your own, and are comfortable dealing with them⁴.

Getting to level 5 is a challenge to be real. Most of us have learned from childhood to cover up parts of our self that we don't think people will like. When we're attracted to someone, we'll hardly walk up to them and say, “Hi, I'm Danny and I'm a bit grumpy, bossy and irrational at times.” We show our best self.

Some of us form a relationship hoping that it will change us, dreaming that we can suck in our stomachs, control our tempers, and become the Handsome Prince or Beautiful Princess. This false self is not convincing for long. When initial infatuation and the sexual starburst fade to a steady glow, we really see who we're with, and show who we really are. That can be scary, but the opportunity to know and be known is our real chance to love and be loved. This is the aim of communication in marriage.

3. Paul, The New Testament: [Ephesians 4:15](#)
See Daniel Goleman (1995) *Emotional Intelligence*, London: Bloomsbury

Application Questions

- What are the main mis-communications you've had so far? What filters do they reveal in you? In your partner? Have you talked these over?
- Ask your partner to make up some heavy, emotional speeches. Practise paraphrasing them. (It will feel funny at first and you might laugh, but you are learning an important skill.)
- Do you ever experience any of the non-listening attitudes? Why?
- Which listening style do you usually practise? What does that say about you? About your partner? Could you change it if you wanted to?
- Be really open here: How happy are you with the usual levels of communication in your marriage? How happy is your partner really? Do you ever get stuck anywhere? Why? What could change that?

Handy Hints for Communication

- Let love be the motivation for all interactions.
- Be interested in each other's interests and concerns.
- Remember to restore the intimacy to your relationship when one of you has had to travel away for periods of time.
- Lay aside regular time for each other.
- Look up facts on your partner's favourite topics.
- Use communication times to ask questions, explore options and ideas and build better understanding.
- Respect your partner's feelings and opinions, even if they differ from yours.
- Avoid interruptions. Allow each other the same amount of time to talk.
- Forgive mistakes and do not dwell on them. Work towards solutions.
- Highlight and focus on the positives.

LESSON 5 - Patterns Run in Families

Ever wondered why your partner's family is so different to your own family of origin? Family patterns can be uncanny and are more than just inheriting grandpa's nose! We learn how to deal with our emotional side from what we see in our families. Encounter the *flight* or *fight* paradigm that most people resort to under pressure. Is there a significant difference between the Pseudo-self and the Real self? Find out how some people deal with emotionally traumatic families.



Have you ever spent a holiday period living with your partner's family? How many times did you scratch your head and wonder why they were so different? Has your partner ever done the same when spending time with your family?

Family patterns can be uncanny – and it's more than just inheriting the family nose.

Let's say you've noticed your wife's father is tall and bossy, and her mother is short and mild. Then you meet the uncles – two tall and bossy, with short, mild wives and one tall and mild ("like his mother") with a short, bossy wife. You notice your wife's grandfather is tall and bossy, and his wife is short and mild. (And family sagas say his parents were like that too.) Why are these patterns repeated? Because it feels normal. They don't even have to think about it. Driving home, you point this out to your wife, and she looks up at you and says mildly, "Hmmm, maybe that's why I was attracted to a tall, bossy man like you."

Families teach ways of living and life commandments ("If you're embarrassed, lie." "All worthwhile people are educated", "Work first, play later.", "Anger is useful." Etc)

That's not to say families produce clones - obviously each child inherits different genes and even identical twins have individual personalities. Plus each child has a different role in the family. For example, the eldest is often asked to be responsible for the younger children, acting the adult while they play, and so grows up responsible, skilled at management, but often a little more serious. The middle child is practised at getting along with people of all ages, and playing follower or leader as required. But middle children can be ignored (because they are neither the biggest nor the cute little one) and so can tend to be private, inner people even in adult life.

Dealing with Emotions

Often the youngest will be the most playful and fun, but may be lazy, irresponsible and used to taking nurture and attention rather than giving to others. These effects are layered onto whatever personalities are already there, and can influence later relationships.

For example, one girl (the youngest) discovered that the last five men she had been out with were the eldest in their family. Although she had never thought about this before, she had been subconsciously looking for stability and leadership to allow her to stay carefree and fun.

We also learn from our families how to deal with emotions. There are two classic ways to deal with negative emotions:

- fight using power, control, blame, stimulation, excitement, rescuing to get control, martyrdom to manipulate, etc.
- flight using withdrawal, sedation, tranquilisation (alcohol, drugs, “happy food”, sugar hits, chocolate), “vegging out” and escapism using movies, Internet etc.

All families have these coping mechanisms in various amounts. The healthier way to deal with negative emotions is to feel them, express them appropriately to someone who cares, and try to work out what you can learn from them.

Why Let Your Grandfather Choose For You?

True example¹

Alan comes home from another business trip to find his wife is leaving him for someone else. He is upset, but not as upset as when he hears his children are not sympathetic and do not want to see him. He takes this as a major wake-up call. He asks his wife what the problem was, and she lets him have it: “You’re never here, and whenever I want to talk about something emotional you suddenly discover a job you have to do. When I’ve tried to love you and compliment you, it’s water off a duck’s back, but two words of praise from your boss and you’ll work all weekend for him. You’re an affirmation-junkie and you hide in your work.”

She has said it all before, but this time Alan listens. He goes for counselling, scared of what he will find but hoping to repair his marriage – or even if not, to grow for himself. He says to the counsellor, “I’m not sure I want to know this, but let’s dig”. And they think about Alan’s family of origin. His father was the top salesman in his company, and on the road a lot – in fact Alan barely remembers contact with him as a child. On holidays, his father would be grumpy or asleep for the first four days, and then he’d take on some project: painting the holiday house, making a boat, building a retaining wall.

Alan eventually realises that he had not received much attention or affirmation from his father, and so craves affirmation from older men - like his boss at work¹. Alan can work an 80 hour week on one compliment. He starts talking to his counsellor about ways to like himself simply for *being* a good person, not for *doing*. Unconditional love – it’s a term he dimly remembers from Scripture class at school, but he had never felt it before.

Alan gets to wondering why his father was incapable of giving him “wise love”. He discovers that his father’s father was an alcoholic, trying to find comfort in the bottle after losing his own father at 11. He was a loner and would never talk to anyone about his issues. And he brought up a son in his image. Alan’s father had found acceptance and hope in a church that ruled out alcohol, and so he had at least avoided becoming an alcoholic like his father – but he had become a workaholic instead.

Alan starts to understand what pushes his buttons. As a child, he used to be afraid of being left alone, probably because he was lonely for his father. His brother coped by being all cuddly and close with their mother, and 20 years later Alan thinks his brother’s marriage is still too clingy and restrictive as though neither really has individuality or freedom (psychologists call this “enmeshed”).

Alan coped by hanging tough as a loner, proving he didn’t need anybody, and dealt with his fear of rejection by getting in first and rejecting other people. But underneath he was anxious to be liked, and would do anything for approval. Alan realises he has been faking it. He has not been real about his feelings – about his real self.

1. Told with permission and some details changed.

The Real Self

The Pseudo-Self²

- obsesses about what other people think
- may not make a decision or be assertive in case someone disapproves
- doesn't hear compliments ("Oh, I don't really deserve it.")
- may be tough or super-competent on the surface, but feels scared

The Real Self

- knows what s/he really thinks and feels (and doesn't confuse the two)
- doesn't ask, "Will others say I'm OK?", but says, "I know I'm OK".
- is satisfied with approval from no-one but him/herself
- will not pretend to be someone else just for acceptance
- enjoys giving and receiving compliments
- is honest, decisive, and assertive

Alan decides to get real.

He is told to:

- develop understanding of his family of origin, the ways he was programmed to feel and act, and any hurts and fears from childhood (sadness, rejection, unresolved anger)
- develop self-awareness (senses, feelings, thoughts, wants, actions, body – see topic #2)
- develop self-esteem, develop himself in relationships, work, hobbies, and doing things for others without wanting anything back.
- be honest with himself
- rely on himself

(Please note: The word "self" is used a lot, but not to suggest that this is some grand project that should ignore the help of God. Faith can be a major source of unconditional love and hope, and can offer power to encourage a person to develop themselves like never before. Understanding and accepting the value God places on us is empowering.)

Alan's outcome

For six months he did counselling, read, wrote a journal, prayed and thought. He attacked this personal growth task with his usual energy and made rapid progress. Around that time, his wife's affair ended, because she did not receive the closeness she was hoping for. Alan asked to see her, and she noticed major growth. They did a lot of talking (at times with help from a counsellor), went through a period of dating, and eventually got their family back together. (If only they all ended this happily!)

2. See David Jansen and Margaret Newman (1989) *Really Relating: How To Build an Enduring Relationship*, p.42ff

Traumatic Families

In families where there is emotional trauma, children are classically pushed into fixed roles³. Meet a family with an abusive alcoholic father:

The Family Hero



Danny, 31, is responsible, perfectionistic, and over-achieving. He is a super-reasonable negotiator. When he pulls up in his BMW for a family get-together and talks about his latest work promotion, it's almost like his family thinks, "See, we must be OK. We're with him." He carries the family pride, and shows that everything is fine. Where did he learn this? When his father used to come home roaring drunk and bash his mother, Danny used to cheer everybody up and tidy the house and send everyone to school with ironed clothes and lunches, and soldier on like everything was fine – and they all thanked him for this. Danny is a very positive thinker, but his problem is that he buries his negative emotions – his fears, his hurts are almost never shared because he fears people might think less of him. Sometimes he struggles with depression, and he wonders if one of his string of girlfriends will ever know the real him.

The Lost Child



Sarah, 28, is very quiet and hard to get to know. She has a steady job as a clerk in a government office, pays rent, and watches a lot of films on the TV in her room. She is never in trouble. At family get-togethers, she enjoys listening and being entertained by the others, and only comments when someone asks her a direct question. When her father used to flail angrily around the house, her solution was to hide and keep quiet. She is still doing it. She doesn't really have friendships or romantic attachments, and rarely shows feelings. She sometimes wonders if she is really alive.

Scapegoat (or "identified patient")



Andy, 25, is in prison. He has unpaid debts, failed relationships - usually with women whose alcohol or drug use suggested addictive personalities - and violent brushes with the law which started when he was 13. When the family discuss his failures, you can almost sense their relief: "At least we're better than that. He's the problem, not us." When his father was violently abusive, Andy used to try to stop him and, when he was hit, fly into a violent rage himself – just like the thing he feared most. Then the family would rush around and comfort him, and he became used to being the troubled victim.

Family Mascot



Nick, 22, has an amazing sense of humour. He is a brilliant IT salesman who attracts bright, responsible women and gets bored with them. Nick's way of dealing with his father's violence was to make black jokes. When he was afraid, he would tell funny stories and break the tension so the family felt better.

The Bottom Line

These patterns are classic in what psychologists call the dysfunctional or chemically dependent family

Adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) form an extreme example, but these symptoms can result from parents with other addictions – work, gambling, food /dieting, sex, unhealthy religion, money, power, shopping, Internet, games, co-dependent relationships, sports⁴.

Note: Many of these things can be good in their place, but they can also be addictive.

In simple terms, an addicted parent cannot give enough “wise love” to the child, and so the child seeks various ways of coping with this emotional response. The cruel thing is that this child will go on to develop his or her own addiction and – even crueller – be unable to give wise love to their children, and so the pattern will continue into the next generation ... UNLESS somebody decides to break the cycle. This can be done.

The bottom line

If you see inherited behaviours, thoughts or feelings in yourself that you don't want, you have a choice. You can let your great-grandfather's problems control your life ... and your partner's. Or you can decide that the problem stops in your generation. Obviously we don't have space here to go into that fully, but your counsellor or minister could refer you to specialist Family of Origin Counselling, or recommend books on the topic.

What's the best gift you can give your family? Yourself at full potential.

4. See Howard Clinebell (1998) *Understanding and Counselling Persons with Alcohol, Drug and Behavioural Addictions*, Nashville: Abingdon Press.

LESSON 6 - Conflict Management

What is the bad news here? That conflict is inevitable! We are all wired to be different. The good news is that conflict management can be done constructively and without physical or verbal abuse. What can we learn from new perspectives on aggression, submission and assertion? When conflict goes unresolved - what are the four main outcomes? Discover 13 tips for dealing with conflict. Check out the roots of anger and is forgiveness an option in the real world?

The bad news: Conflict is inevitable. You will always have different personalities, needs, views and wishes.

The good news: It can be done constructively (believe it or not)

Assertion: free to choose your response

Charlie comes home from work angry after a bad day. Pam is watching television while she does some ironing, and he blurts out, "It must be nice to be able to sit and watch TV all day!" Pam is left with three choices:

1. Aggression (I win, you lose.)

"Pity your mother didn't teach you manners. Go yell at her. You've finished work, but I'll still be here at 10 pm. Does your majesty want dinner?" She feels justified saying this - but the result will be war.

Aggression can be:¹

- verbal "you should", "you never", "you make me", plus criticism, sarcasm, threatening, put downs
- non-verbal the silent treatment, cold or mocking expressions, physical violence
- passive little paybacks that seem innocent, but are actually getting at the other; passive aggression is a sneaky attempt to get power
- displaced aimed at the wrong person or time; for example, your boss annoys you so you yell at your wife

Aggression is the attempt to be superior and demand more rights. Though you think it will make you win and them lose, in fact you usually both lose. It shows little respect for the other person - unless they respond appropriately they may turn into a doormat or a warrior. And surprisingly, it reveals that you have little respect for yourself, because you obviously are not confident of your ability to get what you need without fighting dirty. But you are a much-loved child of God. And so is the other person.

1. David Jansen and Margaret Newman (1989) *Really Relating: How To Build an Enduring Relationship*, Sydney: Random House

Submission & Assertion

2. Submission (I lose, you win)

Pam could keep quiet, roll her eyes and play victim. "OK, I'm sorry." (While thinking: You rat!)

Submission is acting like they are superior and have more rights than you. This can seem very peace-loving and saintly, but in fact it allows the person to keep offending and turns you into a rumbling volcano of resentment and fear that will eventually blow. It can cause stress symptoms (headaches, loss of sexual desire, depression, drinking or drugging, etc). Submission may look friendly, but the friendship is superficial because people do not see what you feel or who you are.

People submit because of low self esteem. "I'm not as good/ educated/ rich/ extroverted/ old/ good looking as you." "The real me is not worth liking." Remember God made you and values you.

3. Assertion (I win, you win)

Assertion is acting as an equal, as though both of you deserve respect and rights.

In an angry situation, Pam might first choose a soft answer. "Hi, honey, sounds like you've had a rough day."

She is acknowledging his emotion, but refusing to take it onto herself - understanding his problem but refusing to make it hers.

Charlie is likely to feel understood and appreciated, and her kindness may make him want to give the same in return. He may not instantly smile and shed his anger, but at least she has not made things worse. If he does not apologise or change his attitude, she may need to speak to him assertively - choosing her moment. "Honey, when you are sarcastic at me, I feel hurt and angry. I'd like you please to ask questions before you shoot." Notice she is not attacking him or talking about his problem. She is saying she has a problem of feeling hurt and angry, and asking for his help to deal with it.

There is:

- responsibility for her own feelings. (Not “You make me angry.”) She speaks for herself.
- no blaming (“Can’t you grow up and take responsibility for your own emotions?”)
- no name-calling (“You big grump.”)
- no demanding
- a clear statement of her needs and feelings, because they matter
- no cowering or false self-blame
- respect for his feelings
- no hard face, no harsh voice, and body language that matches
- a chance for him to reply and be listened to

Assertiveness builds the self-esteem and respect of both parties. It makes for honest, open relationships without fear, and a loving goodwill that tries to meet everyone’s needs. Of course it is not easy to learn or practise. It requires self-understanding and self-discipline not just to follow your hurt, angry feelings. But the old proverb says, “Whoever rules his own spirit is stronger than the mighty.”²

2. Solomon, [Proverbs 16:32](#)

Sorting Out Conflict

What if you don't sort out conflict?

Any marriage counsellor will tell you about the clients who come in totally surprised that the marriage blew apart after half a dozen years. "Everything seemed fine..." they say. Often that is related to bottling up conflict, which is unhealthy in the long-term. Here are some possible results:

- **Distance** If you pull away for a breather, fine. But years of hiding your feelings can put you on another planet emotionally. One partner blunders on, never knowing what is wrong.
- **Numb feelings** You want to keep the peace, but if you keep giving in and repressing your hurt and angry emotions, you will be festering underneath. Eventually you may become practised at ignoring your emotions.
- **Someone else** Having an affair, complaining to your sympathetic parents, or unburdening to the children until they take your side - all of these are ways of letting someone in closer than your partner. These can be ways of taking revenge and comforting yourself, but they are short-term, cop-out "solutions" which only worsen your problem. They also damage someone else – potentially putting hurt, confusion and guilt on your lover, stressing your parents, and darkening your children's view of love.
- **The suffering saint** When there is conflict, you can play the poor, innocent martyr in an attempt to get sympathy and control. It is false humility - you are really trying to one-up your partner and show anyone who'll listen that you're better.

What you need is frank discussion of your issues. Even if you don't assert perfectly or manage the conflict brilliantly, and there are some hot words and emotional turbulence, you can always apologise (though don't back down from your points), and at least you have the issues out on the table. When you both cool down and have time to think, you can discuss them rationally, with the help of a counsellor if necessary.

Tips on Dealing with Conflict

1. Define the issue - and stick to it. Don't bring up every past grievance just to score points and prove they really are an idiot. Minimise upset by sticking to the point.
2. Speak for yourself. Don't try to put your feelings on someone else or spread blame for your actions. For example, saying "You're making me so angry" is manipulation. Saying "I'm feeling so angry" (in a way that doesn't blame or threaten them) is fair.
3. Use paraphrasing. Check that you have understood rather than assumed. It may feel artificial and seem like a waste of time, but it helps them to feel you've at least heard and acknowledged what they've said, even if you go on to disagree.
4. Open them up, don't shut them up. You have a choice. Do you want your partner to feel safe enough to tell you what is really going on and what they need? If so, keep calm, be quiet when they need time to think, and listen respectfully till they finish. Or do you want to close them down, suppress their opinion, and pretend it will all go away? If so, shout, turn on tears, bully, infer they're silly, threaten, walk out, and jump into debate before they finish.
5. No fouls. Admit it: when you are hurt and angry, there is satisfaction in upsetting the other person, especially if you can do it with seeming innocence, by "accidentally" hitting sensitive points. But if they hit back, the cycle will go on and on. Perhaps you will have to be the first one to inject some respect and goodwill into the situation. This will not make you look weak – it will win you credibility and trust. If you want a win-win, what you really need is a calm partner who is not about to take revenge on you. If you do foul, apologise and stop.
6. Stop before you blow. If the discussion is getting really heated and irrational and there's about to be serious hurt (verbally or physically), take a time-out. Agree on this beforehand so it doesn't look like a walk-out tactic.
7. Be well rested. Conflict takes a lot of energy, so take a break before fatigue takes away your clear thinking and emotional balance. Sure, the old proverb says, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger"³, and it's wise to sort out conflicts and make up before bed-time. BUT that doesn't mean you must sort it out before you can sleep. Who thinks clearly at 3am after 5 hours of courtroom drama in the bedroom? If you agree to continue later, you'll be amazed how morning light can bring optimism and a willingness to drop petty issues.
8. Give them wins. If you give one, you're more likely to get one. Obviously you should not compromise on your core issues, but try to give them some wins. Don't forget that you actually love this person and want to give them what they need!
9. Try to think rationally. and separate that from what you feel. Listen to your emotions, but don't just react to them.

10. Threats and aggression may seem powerful, but they make your partner feel threatened and often end up escalating the conflict. Strong people don't need to threaten.
11. Assess if there is an underlying issue. For example: Jane buys a little black dress for a party. Andy blows up, criticising the dress out of all proportion. Jane does not retaliate, but keeps calm and listens kindly. Eventually Andy feels safe enough to say that when other men pay attention to Jane, he feels that he is not attractive enough to keep her love. He has never seen it this clearly before, and apologises for his blowup. Jane shows him she loves him deeply. Andy says she looks gorgeous in the dress. (If only all conflict ended like this - with greater understanding.)
12. Build the emotional environment. Conflict is so much less threatening when there is general good will in the marriage, when each partner feels valued and secure, and your "love tank" is full. (That is, each partner's emotional need for love and acceptance is regularly met.) When you know you're loved, a difference of opinion provides a valued second opinion and a chance to understand another interesting person. But when you feel a bit insecure and second-rate, every difference seems to mean you are strange and your needs may not be met.
13. Build hope. Sometimes conflict can be so discouraging and hurtful that you wonder if you'll ever get out the other side. Even in a marital war-zone, you'll be amazed at the great effect of a comment like "I know we're angry now, but I really do love you and I want to give you what you need."

The Roots of Anger

If you've seen nice people get totally irrational in conflict, you know that it's all about feelings. But what feelings?

Some people will tell you that in conflict there's no other emotion but anger. But anger is not a primary emotion, it is always a response to fear or hurt, even if you push those emotions down so quickly that you don't even feel them. (Men often feel fear, pain or sadness but express these as anger because that is seen as being macho and OK for men.) In fact anger is caused by two primary emotions: fear and hurt. In his realistic book *Dealing With Anger*⁴, Frank Donovan describes how to help people look at their recent angry episodes and asking exactly what they felt – and how that linked to their past hurts and fears. He looks through past experiences to see what emotional fuel might be driving the anger, those “unexpressed, hidden, disowned but accumulated experiences of pain and fear”⁵. This throws up a list of pains and fears which can then be dealt with.

Fear, for example, fear of being abandoned, shamed, helpless, threatened, harmed, made to look silly, etc

How do you deal with fear? You need:

1. Understanding, both of yourself (why you feel that way) and from someone else (acceptance of you and your feelings). Often expressing your fear to a good listener can take away its power.
2. A strategy to deal with it. This is a concrete and logical way of reassuring you. **Hurt**, for example, from being criticised, mocked, ignored, abandoned, bullied, controlled or disrespected in some way.

People try to solve it by:

- Repressing - denying it hurts and soldiering on (for example, becoming a workaholic), but this only buries pain which can come out as depression
- Repaying - starting a cycle of payback, or sometimes hitting back at the wrong people
- Recycling - constantly chewing over old issues, repeating them in your future life, being trapped in them
- Releasing - talking to someone you trust about what caused the pain.

What does a hurt person need?

- Understanding You need to be able to put into words what has hurt you, describe how it felt and what you understand about the situation, and to analyse it with your brain. You also need someone else to understand.
- You need to forgive.

4. Subtitle: *Self-Help Solutions for Men*, Sydney: Finch Publishing, 1999.

5. Donovan p.35

Forgiveness in The Real World

When you are hurt, you have two options: revenge or forgiveness.

If you take revenge, the chances are they will too. You will hit back, they will hit you, you will.... and you will be stuck in an unending cycle. Welcome to many world trouble spots! You will be damaged, and carry an emotional load of worry, guilt, pain and strife. If you choose forgiveness, you are mainly helping yourself move beyond past pain. You also give them the chance to cut free of past mistakes, and to re-invent themselves as they would like to be. Too airy-fairy? Lewis Smedes breaks some myths that make forgiveness seem impossible.

Forgiveness is not:

- Tolerating wrongs. You don't have to be hurt again or excuse bad actions. In extreme cases you have a right to justice.
- Forgetting. (As if you could remove part of your brain.)
- Ignoring your emotions. (They need to be guided with reason, but they are valuable.)
- Soft-headed thinking. E.g. saying "Who am I to judge?" (You have every right, because you are someone with a conscience and with rights.) Or saying, "Maybe it's partly my fault." (And maybe not – they still chose and no-one forced them.)
- Quick and easy.

Forgiveness is:

- Rediscovering the humanity of the person who hurt us (realising they're not a monster, but a person with faults – like us).
- Surrendering your right to get even.
- (Gradually) revising our feelings towards them, focussing on the positive.

When you remember that we all make mistakes, you realise no relationship could last a week without forgiveness. If you have ever experienced forgiveness (by God or people), you know how powerful it is.

LESSON 7 - Intimacy and Sex

Do you know what are the 5 different languages of love? Are you currently fulfilling one of those inner needs in your partner? Why not? Yes, sex can be reduced to just an indoor sport, but what are some powerful strategies for building or rebuilding *intimacy*. What do the marriage therapists say are the 5 main ways of creating a loving and lasting relationship? If headaches persist after reading this topic - you'd better see a counsellor!

Finish this sentence: I feel most loved when... Do you know how your partner would answer?

If you don't know - or if you think "love language" means cooing in French or singing in Italian - you need to read this. Your primary love language is the main way you've learned to give and receive love¹. It could be one or more of the following:

1. Words of Affirmation

For example, "I love your big arms." "You were the prettiest girl there." "Thanks for being so patient with the children." "You're so much fun." "Really appreciate your effort." You may think this is too simple, but words can inspire people, and love is kept alive by a basic human need - appreciation. Sincere compliments also help you to focus on the best things about your partner, rather than thinking about their weak points. And the best way to make sure someone repeats a good action is to appreciate it - to "catch them doing something good" and make a fuss. (If you do it to manipulate, they will see through you.) Remember to affirm someone for who they are at least as much as what they do. If this does not come easily to you, start with small things and watch the effect.

2. Quality Time

This means just being together - not watching TV, not working, just relaxing and talking and focusing on each other. So many busy people forget how important this is, and lose their romance and closeness. Quality time should include fun activities and real listening and attention: eye contact, not fiddling with something else, listening for feelings and facts, watching their body language and refusing to interrupt. It also means taking your turn to talk with deep, kind honesty.

3. Gifts

For some people, gifts are proof that you love them and have thought about them. And it needn't be pearls or BMWs - if you are broke, try a hand-written card or a bunch of flowers (don't tell her you got them from the cemetery!). The emotional significance of the gift is less to do with its cost than what it says (Hint: don't give bathroom scales). Practical gifts (for example, a vacuum cleaner) do not touch the heart like intimate gifts (great underwear, or a \$5 bottle of massage oil and a voucher for 10 massages), humorous gifts, or something they've been wanting for their hobby (which shows you listen).

1. See Gary Chapman (1995) *The Five Love Languages*, Chicago: Northfield Publishing.

Love Languages

4. Acts of Service. Some people appreciate a simple home-cooked meal more than a five-star restaurant. Repairing someone's car, sewing on a loose button or fixing their computer can be a powerful way to say you notice them and care about their happiness. These may be small things, and they can even include housework (which is often under-rated as demeaning work), but they mean a lot. Serving doesn't mean being a doormat. Jesus said, "The greatest among you is the one who serves"².
5. Physical Touch. Everyone knows that babies who are hugged a lot develop healthier emotions, but what about adults? Some people feel most loved when they are touched - playing footsies, holding hands, kissing, a massage, cosy cuddling on the sofa and, of course, sex, which is a whole dialect of its own.

Simply put, the aim of these languages is simply to keep filling the "love-tank", the emotional need in every person, so that love does not empty away in a marriage.

The confusing part is that each partner may have a different primary language.

- In the middle of a blazing row, he roars, "Of course I love you. Why else would I work 80 hours a week to buy you all this?" She snaps back, "I could live without a new Mercedes, Jack, I want a husband around." He is speaking the language of gifts, but she only understands quality time.
- He says, "When she touches me out in public, I feel so proud. And sex somehow blows away conflict and makes me feel really close to her." She says, "Good, but if he hasn't said nice things to me and complimented me through the day, I find it hard to get my heart open enough to get turned on." His primary language is touch. She vaguely understands that as a kind of second language, but spoken affirmation is what really feeds her emotionally

What can you do with this?

1. Understand your primary love language. What did you say made you feel most loved? What category does that fit into? What about your partner's answer?
2. Learn to speak your partner's primary love language. It may not seem important to you, but it is to them. Even if it feels a little false and awkward at first, it will still be appreciated and it will start to come more naturally to you. This may sound too simple, but it will build love into a marriage.
3. Ask for what you need. Don't expect them to mind-read. And don't ask with criticism, but with positive expectation of them. Be patient if they don't instantly get it.
4. Realise that if you and your partner have full "love tanks", conflict will be much less threatening.

Counsellors will tell you that most couples can't believe this can help put the juice back into their marriage because it seems so simple. "What, you're telling me that if I give her two sincere compliments every day, that will make her feel loved? It seems such a small thing." Not if she's starving for it. "You claim that if I just drop everything for half an hour and listen with interest to what happened at his work, it will make that big a difference?" Try it and see.

2. [Matthew 23:11](#)

Sex and Intimacy

Let's be realistic: Sex can just be an indoor sport.

But at its best it involves intimacy and is a language of love between two people. Your major sex organ is the six inches between your ears.

Interestingly the Biblical word for sex is **"to know"**, which means intimacy.

Bill³ invited me round to see his race car. After half an hour of V8 heaven, Bill got a serious face on.

"So, how do you make a woman lose interest in sex?" he asked.

"How?"

"Marry her." And he laughed a bitter laugh. "Seriously, I can understand guys getting a girlfriend as well." He said women were a mystery to him, then asked, "So what do I do?" I said, "OK, let me ask you: My car is hard to start and doesn't perform. What do I do?" "It could be a few things. Electrical system, fuel supply, blocked air breather..." "Right, and there are only a few basic systems that affect a person's sexual desire. One, physical health."

"No, she's fit and healthy."

"OK, so it's psychological. Things like her general happiness, whether she feels OK about herself and her life."

"She's OK on that. What else?"

"The quality of your relationship generally."

"Ahh, well, we've been having a few hassles, but that never seems to worry me when it comes to sex. I can enjoy the sex for its own sake. But women..." – he waved his hands around - "They're always worrying about the relationship!" He said "relationship" like a foreign word or a disease. "Relationships are so vague!"

"Unlike engines, which you find easy. You can listen to your car for ten seconds and work out what's wrong."

"Exactly!"

"But someone taught you that. Who ever taught you about relationships? Your father?" He laughed. "No way. What could he teach?"

"Okay, well there are a few basic systems.

3. We have changed the name and some details.

5 Points of Love

Two marriage therapists named L'Abate and Talmadge described love in five main ways.

1. Receiving care
2. Giving care. So what's the link to sex? Good sex has to be giving and taking - like a good relationship. Sex can be just two people taking flat out, bargaining to get what they want. Or it can be one person usually giving and the other person usually pretty selfish. But if you both enjoy giving the other person pleasure, and know how to enjoy receiving it yourself..." "Then kaboom", he was nodding. "If you've been pushing for your own way all day, it's not easy to climb into bed and give."
"Exactly. And if you think love is control and you want to keep your distance, or you think love is smothering and you want to be free to be yourself, or you think love must be earned, or even that you're not a lovable person, you can't receive. Okay, then you have.
3. Seeing the good in her and yourself. If you've felt like a useless loser all day, it's hard to climb into bed and perform. Same if you've been telling her she's foolish, even in subtle ways. That brings us to the next one, which is:
4. Forgiving. That's what allows you to put mistakes behind you both, rather than let them build up. If you know your lover is critical in bed and in life generally, and any blunders will be held against you, then you'll feel serious performance pressure and you'll freeze up. You need to be safe to try new things. "Love keeps no record of wrongs"⁴. Bill looked at me. "Then that's the problem. I can be a bit critical. I admit it. Learned it from my father, I suppose." And so we talked about that for a while. He decided he'd ask her if that was a problem, and then apologise. He decided to thank her more and appreciate what she did - in bed and out - and to shut his mouth when he felt critical. If it was a big thing, he would choose his moment and tell her nicely, but otherwise let little things pass. We never did get onto the next point, which was:
5. Intimacy, which is basically letting the other person know who you really are, not keeping parts of yourself hidden from them. This takes courage - what if your lover sees the real you and rejects you? But intimacy is the difference between just having sex and actually making love. You can buy sex, but intimacy can't be bought, prefabricated or bargained for. It can only be built with time.

But Bill did say he wished someone had sat him down and taught him this stuff in plain language. If you ask me, it's a lot simpler to learn than a supercharged engine.

4. Paul, *The New Testament: 1 Corinthians 13:5*.

Sex Therapy

Most people think sex therapy is learning new techniques – how to hit the G-spot, perform a new gymnastic position from the Karma Sutra, or maintain erection for a week using Zen meditation.

New techniques are great, and old-fashioned sex experts like Masters and Johnson used to focus on technique and ignore the non-sexual parts of the relationship. (It was the 1960s.) But more recently, sex therapists have looked at the couple's relationship as well as their plumbing⁵.

This surprises some people. A lot of us think sex is a natural physical thing that just works. We come from the "Just Do It" school of sex education, strutting through our fantasies as sexual masters on a James Bond level. We're surprised how much sex has to do with relationship and love. But of course it does - if it's making love!

For example, Larry Hof asks clients with sexual problems how good their relationship is. He runs a range of tests that would put car mechanics to shame:

- How included and connected do they feel - too clingy and smothered or too lonely?
- Are they equally committed to the relationship?
- If not, the more committed one can be manipulated.
- How is power shared? Are both partners happy with that?
- Do they fight over having and doing, or are they happy just being together?
- In conflict and negotiation, how well do they read each other emotionally? How fair-minded and logical are they?
- Do they express emotions in a healthy way?
- Do they think clearly? They need to avoid:
 - over-generalisations ("Everyone always leaves me.")
 - all-or-nothing thinking ("Joe has a problem with anger so he's totally evil.")
 - taking things personally ("You don't feel like sex, so I must be unlovable.")
 - expecting mind-reading ("I need comfort, so why don't you comfort me!")
 - emotional slavery ("You know how I feel, so you have to do what I want.")
 - saviour syndrome ("I should be able to fix whatever's wrong between us.")
- How good are they at bargaining? Can they negotiate deals?
- How well do they communicate? Can they ask for what they need without blaming or attacking? Can they listen for emotions behind what is said? Can they listen actively, giving feedback and checking that they understood? If not, how can they listen in bed?
- How well do they manage conflict? Can they identify and "own" their feelings, accepting them as theirs rather than blaming their partner for the way they feel? Can they identify the real issue? (Often this is not the obvious one.) Can they avoid dredging up past conflict, but stay in the present? Can they walk away when anger

is about to become destructive, or take a stroll when they need some of the perspective of distance? Can they identify common ground and begin their discussion there?

5. See David Snarch (1991) *Constructing the Sexual Crucible: An Integration of Sexual and Marital Therapy*, New York: W.W.Norton & Co; , or Gerald R. Weeks and Larry Hof (1987) *Integrating Sex and Marital Therapy: A Clinical Guide*, New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Putting Relationships to The Test

- What are each partner's expectations for the relationship? For example, he thinks he has to earn the money and she look after the children. She thinks there should be equality in both. They may have fought over specific issues without ever talking about the assumptions behind it all. When they understand each other, they can begin negotiation. Each partner has beliefs on expectations of marriage - roles, frequency of sex, family size, how close and intimate.
- Do they understand the influence of their families? Face it, to some degree your sexual future depends on your mother-in-law! (And your father-in-law of course.) What attitude did they pass on to your partner?
- How intimate are they and how comfortable are both partners with that intimacy? People can be afraid of intimacy, fearing being laughed at, criticised, losing control or being taken over. (Others list at least twelve types of intimacy: sexual, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, creative, recreational, work, crisis, commitment, spiritual, communication and conflict.)⁶.

While we're talking intimacy, religions are about spiritual relationships. For example, six of the Ten Commandments are about how we treat other people and another advises a day of rest so that workaholism does not destroy relationships. So do religious people have better relationships? One study found that women who call themselves religious (whether Christians or Jews) are more sexually satisfied than average, more secure and - surprisingly to some - have fewer problems with frigidity. Other sex therapists⁷ consider psychological issues like body image and beliefs about sex.

...so Sex. What's Love got to do with it?

Everything!

6. See Schnarch (1991) p.91; see also Stephen R. Treat (1987), "Enhancing a Couple's Sexual Relationship", in Weeks & Hof, p.60.
7. For example, Treat, (1987).

LESSON 8 - For Richer, For Poorer: Love and Money

What do you think is the greatest stressor in a couple's relationship? How money is used or misused always comes in at number one! It is the greatest source of conflict. How we use money goes back to our childhood, family, feelings of self-worth, employment and is a virtual minefield of unexploded expectations! What can be done? Learn 5 common approaches to dealing with money. Recognise that a lot of money issues are tied up with feelings of power. Plus you will encounter 7 steps to finally getting your money worries under control.

Money is the greatest conflict issue in relationships. Couples told one survey that they fight more about money than in-laws, sex, work, children or lack of time together¹.

Money is a very emotional subject. It's connected to your self-esteem and feelings of value as a person, and to feelings that go back to childhood - rivalry, tension, sadness, excitement, embarrassment. It's also linked to your family relationships, especially for women.

Do we love it? Surprisingly, most people have negative feelings about money. Market research on the emotions associated with money found the top answers were worry, anxiety, concern, depression, stress, anger, failure and helplessness – and this was true across all income levels. Answers like pleasure, freedom and enjoyment came well down the list, in both Australian and American studies.

And we tend to be secretive about money. Many people feel that it measures the importance and success of their whole lives, and so find it harder to talk about than sex or religion. We're trained from childhood that money is private. We don't like being compared. If we don't have enough, we might feel shame. If we have too much, we might suffer from other's jealousy or being "used" and asked for help. Most of us don't know what our friends or parents earn, and 16% of wives and 32% of husbands don't know their partner's income, according to a British study.

1. News Limited, 1996

What Can be Done?

Understand your own money baggage

What affects your feelings about saving and spending? In her brilliant book *The Secret Life of Money*², Valerie Wilson suggests the following:

- Childhood training – your parents’ words and actions, but also their attitudes which you picked up without them ever being spoken; also your siblings; for example, “I saw my Dad work himself into an early grave making us rich, and I over-reacted the other way. I guess I became a lazy party boy.”
- Your predisposition – saver or spender. One British study found that the habit of saving – or not saving – was formed by the age of eight.

Believe it or not, there is a pleasure in saving and some people enjoy it best. For example, Albert grew up in a large family in a poor suburb, and was taught to “work hard, be happy living simply, and save for a better future”. When he eventually became a barrister with a high income and impressive investment portfolio, he still lived very simply and saved most of what he earned, because “you never know when you’ll need it”.

For him the pleasure was not spending the money, but having it – saving made him feel secure, powerful and self-controlled. He also thought the best thing he could give to his family was this security, and the ability to save and invest well, rather than “all the Ritchie Rich toys” that would “spoil” them.

Yet his wife Penny felt he was crazy. Her family had been comfortably off, “the middle of the middle”, and she felt no desire to become very wealthy through hard saving and investment. She enjoyed spending money, and felt it was unreasonable to keep saying “maybe later” to themselves and their children when they could afford comforts now. The best way to be happy was to have toys and experiences that Albert had missed out on as a boy. She wanted good holidays, including a trip to Disneyland, to “give the children a broader idea of life”.

Albert made his son earn his first bike by mowing the lawn for 6 months. He felt this would “teach him the value of a dollar”. His son learned that the bike cost somebody hours of hard labour.

2. *The Secret Life of Money: Exposing the Private Parts of Personal Money*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999

What Can Be Done?

Whose approach do you agree with most?

If you save too much, you might remind yourself that the whole point of saving is to spend in the future. Delayed gratification is fine, but if you take it too far it's no gratification at all. If you spend too much, you might remind yourself that saving and investing will give you more to spend in future.

- Your personality - Are you generally an optimist or pessimist? A British study found people will save if they regard the future as predictable and improving. If they have a gloomy view of the future, they tend to live for now and spend all they can³. Are you a risk-taker or not? Competitive or not? These will affect your decisions.
- Your self-esteem - For example, "I'm useless with money. I can't ever see myself being anything but broke." "Spending makes me feel loved." "I have trouble spending on myself because I didn't work to deserve it." These prophecies tend to be self-fulfilling. You will act on what you believe about yourself unless you make conscious effort to change.
- Social expectations – for example, someone in your profession should drive a better car.
- External pressures – advertising, media.
- Your parents' socio-economic class - One researcher found that upper- and middle-income parents say, "We can't afford it" (even when they can) as a way of controlling their children's materialism and complacency. Lower-income parents try not to say it even though it's true, hoping to shield their children from the money worries and discouragement they feel.

You could examine your own baggage by asking yourself questions like these:

- What emotions do you usually feel about money? About your own financial performance? What does that tell you?
- How high is your financial self-esteem? Why?
- What were the top 5 principles your parents told you about money? (Either in their words or their attitudes.) Are these sensible and still useful, or do you want to re-think them as an adult?

For example, people in upper-income brackets often mention that their childhood training had to do with working hard, saving, investing and being responsible. Does this make sense? Can it be taken too far? When you think logically about it, should you tilt your balance one way or the other?

Your Financial Baggage

Make your choices

The first step is to understand your feelings and their causes, but this should not give you an excuse to stay with unwise patterns. The next step is to take responsibility for yourself – to learn, think, and choose the life you want in cooperation with your partner.

For example, Keith had worked his way up from poverty and now valued himself and others by what they earned and owned. His son Nigel saw Keith as career-obsessed and an unbalanced person, and valued his mother's kind character and relationship skills more than his father's Porsche. He dropped out of university and spent a few years as a penniless musician. Later, he decided that was just a rebellion against his father, and he is now making his own choices. He has an above-average income, but time and energy for his wife and children. His wife helped him find his own values, and they are in control of their life together, rather than letting the past control them.

How do you want to act and feel about money?

Understand your partner's money baggage

What did they answer above? How can you help each other? Discuss this together – and remember to be gentle on this sensitive topic.

Recognise that "MONEY is POWER!"

Whoever makes the money decisions in a marriage has a large amount of power. Actually, managing the money is not the same as controlling it – in some traditional families, the woman may handle the cash but the man makes the decisions. (In extreme cases, a partner may use money to wield power harshly, for example, depriving a woman of the petrol money to go out until she obeys. That is called financial abuse.)

There are **five main ways** couples organise their financial affairs:

1. He's the manager.
2. She's the manager.
3. An allowance system (For example, he works. She gets a weekly amount for household expenses, and how she manages it is her business.)
4. Shared management. He manages some areas (for example, cars, investments), she manages others (for example, the mortgage, holidays) from a shared bank account.
5. Independent management. Separate bank accounts, separate ownership of assets.

No system is right or wrong, as long as it works in practice and feels right for both partners. If one partner feels they are not trusted, respected, cared for, or consulted, it's time to negotiate changes. The key principle is to use power for love, not selfishness.

Educate Yourself

Yet often it seems the system is not clear. One Australian study asked people which partner controls the money in their house, and came up with these confused figures:

- The man, according to 38% of men and 26% of women.
- The woman, according to 13% of women and 19% of men.
- Both equally, according to 56% of women and 43% of men.

Huh? What's the real story? Are some people in denial, or just ashamed to admit what's really happening? Sounds like men and women need to talk to each other! Another interesting statistic: 16% of people have a bank account that is kept secret from their spouse. What do you think of that? Why?

How much do you know about basic money management and investment? Most people know very little (even many who work in finance). Many people feel too poor and hopeless to bother, or too rich and busy to need to learn the basics. That may be why only 8% of people will ever achieve financial security, according to Noel Whittaker. His book *Making Money Made Simple*⁴, is a brilliant introduction to the basics of money. The principles apply whether you're a merchant banker or on welfare. They're common sense – but not very common. Here are some:

1. **Winners don't spend all they earn:** One problem with spending all you earn is that you will have to borrow for emergencies – and that costs you interest. Another problem is that you will never improve your future income through investments. It's not just poorer people who make this mistake. Many "high-fliers" feel they don't need to invest because they are earning well today. But if you save \$50 per week starting today, how much will you have in 25 years? A whopping \$1.4 million. Winning psychology breaks huge goals up into small, achievable steps – and then feels good about them along the way. And it's never too late to start. You will benefit.
2. **Winners avoid debt like the plague:** They rarely buy now and pay later. This means they avoid paying crippling interest. For example, Bill has \$3,000 and spends it on electronic gadgets, then buys a \$10,000 car with a loan, borrowing at 12% interest. Over 5 years, the car actually costs \$14,200. At the end of that time, it is worth \$5,000 and he has nothing in the bank. Meanwhile Liz has \$3,000 and buys a \$3,000 car. She saves what Bill spent on repayments, and after five years has \$14,200 plus her car, now worth \$1,500. This sets her up to invest in her first flat, and a life of wise investment.
 - It will increase your income more than it costs (for example, equipment)
 - You can save by buying now (for example post-Christmas clothing sales)
 - The price is going up faster than you can save
 - Owning it will save time and money (for example, work car)
 - It's cheaper to replace than repair. But even then it's still a risk.

4. Simon & Schuster, 1996

Money principles

3. Winners don't borrow for things that lose value: For example, cars and electronic equipment. It may be quite sensible to borrow if that's the only way you can get things that increase in value (for example, houses) or productive assets (for example, work tools, education). But borrowing for luxuries is financial suicide. It means you will have less money tomorrow.
4. Winners know the importance of time and rate: Whittaker shows that if you invest \$10,000 at 15% when you're 20 years old, it will be worth an unbelievable \$5.3 million when you turn 65. Someone who invests the same sum at age 50 will have it worth \$81,370. The point is that you should start saving as early as you can. Time is money. And money takes time. As Solomon said, "The person who does the right thing will prosper, but the person who wants a get-rich-quick scheme will quickly fail."⁶

And we'd add three more:

5. Give: Find a cause or charity you believe in, and be generous regularly, starting even when you're young and poor. It will improve your gratitude and may stop your children being selfish. (Choose a reputable, audited charity and demand accountability.) Most people spend big dollars on security, but if we invested similar amounts in poor children, there may be fewer break-ins and fewer wars.
6. Money is not the meaning of life: Surprisingly, studies show that when people are freed from worrying about basics like food, shelter and health, they find other things to worry about - themselves and their relationships.⁷ Solomon, king of Israel some 3,000 years ago, was so rich that Bill Gates only recently exceeded his wealth. Yet he wrote, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income."⁸
7. Don't value yourself materialistically: Can you assess the worth of a person by their brand names? If so, that would leave Gandhi, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela looking worthless.

The important things in life are not things – they're people, ideals and relationships. Even if many of us are not formally religious, perhaps we need a reminder that "a person's life is not made up of the amount of things they own", as Jesus Christ said nearly 2000 years ago.

6. Proverbs 28:20

7. Wilson, p.6.

8. Ecclesiastes 5:10

PARENTING? (Topics 9-14)

What if you are single? Surely this next section is not important? Well, the answer maybe Yes and it maybe No! Although the next 6 topics focus on Parents and Kids - they are applicable to anybody. Everyone is a son, or a daughter of parents. So the following topics cover issues like the psychology of love, the limits in discipline, preventing addiction and the common elements of successful families. Your understanding of RELATIONSHIPS will be expanded and enriched as you work through these few Parenting topics. Want to get on better with your friends' and neighbour's kids? Continue on or read the Topics page and choose which is appropriate for you.

LESSON 9 - What Kind of Parent Are You?

You will be relieved to hear that there is not just *one* correct parenting style - so that's a relief! However, people today often slip into parenthood without much thought and find that they do less to qualify for it, than they once did to pass their car license! Find out which parenting style you fit into from the 5 different approaches. Learn which parenting styles go to extremes and what to do about it. There is also a guide for parents to reassure them of how to cope with the everyday rigours that children bring into their lives.



People walk, dive or slip into it without much thought, running on autopilot. But that's not you if you're bothering to do a course like this. Others feel high anxiety that they must parent perfectly from the textbook.

The good news for them is that, while there are methods that don't work, there is no one correct parenting style. You don't have to turn into someone else – your personality will do fine. In fact your greatest gift to your children is yourself – especially if you are into personal growth, working towards being balanced, sorting out weak areas, and simply loving and available. What kind of parent are you? You could identify basic parenting styles¹, each of which have strengths to build on and weaknesses to watch:

- The Rules Parent. This parent is self-motivated, organised, high-achieving, a born leader and quite controlling. They don't waste time, money or words. Yet they need to learn to relax more, to be less judgmental of people, be a little more flexible, not to set impossibly high standards, more gentle and patient, and to love people unconditionally rather than for what they do. (If you're reading this and saying, "Ha! Not in the real world!", then you're a classic.)
- The Easygoing Parent. This personality is fun, optimistic, future-focussed, and great at motivating a group. They are great friends with their children and love to play. Yet they need to be consistent, and do the hard yards of parenting. They should stop avoiding confrontation and take the occasional strong stand, even if this means the whole world may not like them.

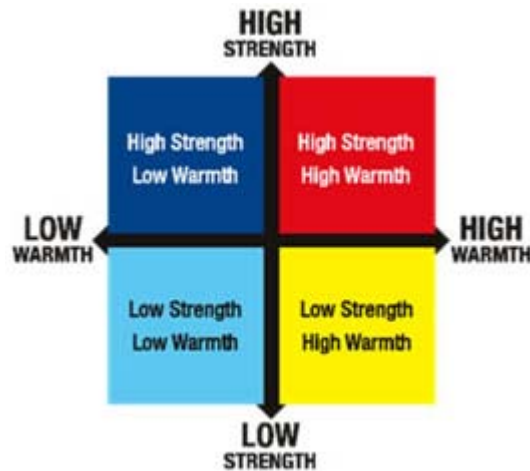
- The Permissive Parent. This parent is very sensitive and caring. They don't want to damage their children in any way. Yet they need to be more emotionally even, and also need to make some firm rules so that children know where the boundaries are and don't feel insecure.
- The Analytical Parent. This parent is careful in making decisions and getting things absolutely right. Yet they need to remember to be warm and to listen.
- The Balanced Parent. Someone who is naturally one of the types above, but is trying to balance out their natural tendencies with learning, growing and team-working with their partner who has different strengths.

1. Greg Smalley and Gary Smalley "Parenting With Style", *Christian Parenting Today*, April 96, p.24ff

Parenting Styles

You may notice the similarities between these first four types of parent and the four Personality Types mentioned back in topic 3.

Steve Biddulph², classifies parents another way. He talks about warmth and strength as two axes on a graph.



So you can imagine how extremes of these types would be:

- **Strong, Cold**

This person would tend to be no nonsense, perhaps too busy and aloof. They would need to work on unconditional love. Their children would be well-behaved, but may feel unloved.

- **Strong, Warm**

This parent would be clear on discipline and responsibilities, but also have a lot of fun and love. This is ideal. Their children know they are loved, and know the rules and why they make sense.

- **Weak, Warm**

This parent would find fun and love easy, but would have little control and not like “feeling bossy”. They would feel walked over. Their children would feel loved but a little insecure and out of control.

- **Cold, Weak**

This poor parent struggles with discipline. They tend not to worry about discipline, then have aggressive explosions, but then feel sorry and apologise, and go back to being weak. They need to learn to be assertive and consistent. They also need to show affection to their children.

Notice these are extremes. Most people are somewhere to the middle.

This graph causes an “Aha!” for some parents because it makes them conscious of where they are. It also shows them it is possible to be very loving and very strong in discipline at the same time.

Biddulph talks about:

- “soft love” - tender, generous, warm love that helps children feel worthy, good, and lovable
- “firm love” – which basically says, “I love you, which is why I won’t let you do this, form a habit, and become a brat that no teacher bothers with and no children want to play with.

Choose the right moment to discuss these questions with your partner in parenthood. Don’t do it when you’re tired, hungry, under pressure or too soon after conflict over children.

Reflect for a moment:

- Where do you feel you are on the graph?
- Where would you like to be?
- Does your partner agree?
- Where do you think your partner is?
- Where would you like them to be?
- Do they agree?
- Where do you think the children would see you both?

Defective Types of Parenting

Jean Illsley Clarke³, lists defective types of parenting. If you see a tendency to any of these in yourself, please don't get the guilts and give up. Just correct the balance – and gradually, taking small steps.

1. The Abusive Parent. “Stop that, you...!!! I wish you'd never been born.” I will never forget hearing that blasting across a grocery store. I don't know the mother, but her child seemed to be a threat to her brittle self-confidence. It looked like she didn't have the emotional strength to be caring under pressure. At first I felt angry with her for hurting her child, but then I realised she had probably been brought up that way and was a hurt child herself. This mother needed re-parenting. That child is probably now a teenager who struggles with feeling worthless, discouraged, hurt, angry and lonely, and is ready to leave home at 14 with the first guy who shows her the slightest affection. I like to hope some caring teacher, coach, youth worker or minister got alongside her and gave some parental support. This is an extreme case, but there are worse – ask any casualty doctor. Yet even the best parents admit moments when they have reacted abusively, even if it's just losing their cool and calling a child a fool. People abuse because they have been abused, or because they feel weak and inadequate and think they can hide their weakness behind anger.
2. The Conditional Love Parent. “Sit still in that trolley or you won't get a drink.” Translation: Behave perfectly, just as I want, or I won't meet your needs. This raises a child that never feels quite good enough. They may become a high achiever in some way, but may never quite believe their achievements, and may never feel lovable or get close to people. This parent needs to love the child just as they are. They also need to love themselves that way! Perhaps their own parenting was lacking in unconditional love. Interestingly, churches often attract people who strive to be perfect to earn God's approval, imagining a conditional love parent in the sky. But good religion teaches that God “loves you with an everlasting love”⁴, and no behaviour can change that. Believing in this kind of heavenly parent can change people's self-esteem.
3. The Indulgent Parent. A child falls over and is not really hurt, but this parent rushes in, makes a huge fuss and takes over. “Oh, poor schnookums. Here, let me carry you.” The message is that the child is a poor, useless victim, and the parent is a noble saint who deserves total obedience. This sounds very loving, but it's really being forced on the child by a parent who is feeling needy and wanting reassurance.
4. The Neglectful Parent. Imagine a child falls over and hurts their knee. This parent may not even be there. They tend to expect others to parent for them: school to teach their child everything they need for life, and church to make them good. They often dump the children on relatives or babysitters. If they do notice the skinned knee, they'll say, “For Pete's sake get over it and toughen up.” This is the way they have been brought up: life is hard and you have to be tough and self-

reliant and expect no pity. Their intentions may be good, but this makes a hard, lonely adult with a lot of pain and anger, and little trust in others. They need someone to show them some care.

5. The Assertively Caring Parent

6. If a child falls over, this parent remains calm, listens to any hurt feelings, gives any help the child asks for or wants, but is not pushy and so builds their independence. This parent would swim through the crocodile tank for the child if necessary, but does not weaken the child's independence by doing too much. An assertive parent sets principles and rules, makes clear requests (and demands if necessary), does not feel guilty about conflict, and can negotiate more as children become more responsible. Having established clear expectations, they can relax and have fun with their child without having to be bossy and "pull rank" all the time.

3. *Growing Up Again* (1978) Oak Grove, MN: Winston

4. [Jeremiah 31:3](#)

Looking After Parents

One great way to look after a child is to look after yourself. Parenthood is a demanding job. Here are a few tips:

- Relax and enjoy it – you’ll do OK. Take parenting seriously, but not so seriously that it shuts you down. Family theorist Edwin Friedman says over-seriousness can be destructive. It can become “an attitude... a total orientation, a way of thinking embedded in constant, chronic anxiety.” He says it makes you less flexible, pressured to try harder but scared to try anything new, or grow beyond the same old stock responses, and shrinks your view of the big picture. He argues that playfulness can loosen you up, give you perspective and flexibility, blow away your stress and make you a calming influence on others. He’s not saying you must be a stand-up comic, but suggesting a more relaxed, playful view of life⁵. Maybe you should watch your favourite comedy show tonight. As the proverb says, *“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine”*.
- If you’re looking for answers on parenting, invest in some good books (for example, anything by Steve Biddulph). If you think the “experts” have been too long in a library and not enough with children, ignore them. Talk to people whose children are doing well and borrow their strategies. Observe people whose children are doing badly – and learn from that as well.
- Value yourself. When people ask what you do, don’t you ever mumble, “Oh, I’m just a Mum.” A friend of ours resigned as Vice-President of an international bank to become a full-time mother. When career people at parties ask what she does, she says, “I was a banker, but I’ve been promoted to motherhood.” Most people think that’s great. Some people don’t get it, or patronise her because they think it’s not as impressive as their earth-changing job - but who cares what some people think? You are shaping the future for the most valuable people in the world. Your respect is written in stone by the finger of God: “Honour your father and your mother.”⁶ Even bankers didn’t get that good a mention. Look after yourself. Take some time out just to think, to exercise, to stuff yourself with chocolate biscuits. (Oh alright, that last one is not a good way to handle stress. You’d be better to go for a walk.)
- Find someone to give you a break even if they just sit in the house for an hour watching your TV when the children are asleep, leaving you free to go for a walk and think.
- Lose the guilt. You will make mistakes. Forgive yourself (God does) and move on.
- Reward yourself
- Don’t misuse your imagination on worrying what might go wrong. Instead, visualise positive things: your children at the graduation ceremony, holding the cup, making the parliamentary speech, wedding speech or Oscar speech (“I’d like to thank my parents.”)
- Don’t expect them to live your life again for you. I’ll never forget watching one father pressure and push his son into ultra-competitive football when the child

really wanted to play the guitar or play basketball. The father had almost made the national football side, and was determined his son would do well where he felt he had failed. This may sound kind, but it's actually selfish. Spare yourself the disappointment.

- Some emotional roller coaster rides will happen. It doesn't mean you're losing the plot, your mind or your children.
- Walk away when you feel anger rising
- Look for role models. If your own parenting has been too harsh, for example, find a gentle, nurturing parent and copy their tactics. It's never too late to re-parent yourself.
- A functional marriage can be a major source of encouragement, balance and love to improve your parenting. Keep putting time, learning and energy into that.
- Find someone to talk to. Hopefully this will be your partner, but ideally also someone outside the home who will listen to you talk so that you get perspective. If you're really blessed, you'll find wise old next-door neighbours with 40 years of nursing, parenting and foster-parenting experience. (Hi, Hugh and Mary!)

5. Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, New York: The Guilford Press, 1985

6. The Ten Commandments, [Exodus 20:12](#)

Sources and Recommended Reading

- *Parenting, the most important job in the world*, at www.community.nsw.gov.au
- Steve Biddulph, *The Secret of Happy Children*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1993
- Jean Illsley-Clarke, *Growing Up Again*, Oak Grove, MN: Winston, 1978
- Matthew R. Sanders, *Every Parent: A Positive Approach to Children's Behaviour*, Australia: Addison-Wesley, 1992

LESSON 10 - The Psychology of Love

Unmet emotional needs are a huge cause of learning and behavioural problems today. Parents today are under work pressure and their children feel it via emotional pressure. Can parents and kids talk openly without there being an *inquisition*? Be aware of 4 inappropriate forms of imitational love and how to avoid them. Discover what are 5 special ways to show children unconditional love. By filling up their little emotional tanks they can go further and faster and be happy!

If we said, "Unmet emotional need is a major cause of behavioural and learning problems, and wise love can fix it", some people would groan and say, "How obvious" or "How twee." But even they wouldn't realise how true it is.

For example, classroom studies show that children under emotional stress achieve far below their potential. If a child still feels sad because Mum and Dad fought last night, how can you expect them to concentrate on geography? If they feel like dirt because someone has bullied them in the playground half an hour ago, how can they feel confident enough to keep trying when a mathematics problem seems hard at first?

Study after study is showing that one major preventative against delinquency is the good quality of the relationship with parents (or a parent figure). This research is dynamite! It has been very unpopular because it seems to put the blame on parents, and Political Correctness likes to pretend we live in a no-fault universe. Of course it's unproductive to burden well-intentioned parents with more guilt, and unfair to blame them for their children's choices or their peers. But parents are a major factor and it's time to give dads and mums a serious wake-up call. You're needed! You're important!

What Does Quality of Relationship Mean?

It means warmth, acceptance, safety and heart-to-heart closeness. It means feeling wanted, liked, valued, included, needed, informed, consulted. It means a child can talk about problems without expecting the Inquisition.

A good relationship builds self-esteem like nothing else. This requires both unconditional love and earned approval.

- Unconditional love is being loved just for being you and being here. You don't have to earn it or deserve it and you can't ever destroy it – in fact it loves you just as much when you've just made a mistake. "I just like you coz you're you."
- Earned approval is being praised when you do good things or display likeable qualities. When you get a high mark, shoot the winning goal, win an award, or look really good, it tells you. It affirms you. Children need this as well. If they receive only unearned love, they can feel a bit lethargic. One child said, "Aw, Mum, you'd tell me I was good even if I was dumb." That's good from one angle, but the child also needs to know the specifics of what people like about them.

How do you do this?

I know a dad who got fired up about this and decided to ask his children a risky question.

He chose the right moment and asked his 8-year-old son, "Do you know that I love you?"

His son said, "Are you OK, Dad?"

He said, "Yeah, I'm serious."

His son said, "A bit."

The Dad was horrified, but stayed neutral. "Well, how do you know that bit?"

The boy paused and said, "When you fixed my computer." The father kept quiet. "And when you took me to work with you in the school holidays."

The father thought about that, and realised that help and time made his son feel loved. That was hardly rocket science, but he had to admit he didn't do much of it. "OK, son", he said. "What else could I do?" The son freely suggested a few things, quite touched that his dad was trying. The father, to his credit, changed plans and took his son go-kart racing. He started inviting him to come with him on various errands to the hardware store and the mechanic. His son wanted to have him around more! He wondered why it took him so long to realise what a compliment that is.

What Does Quality of Relationship Mean?

The same father went to his 13-year-old daughter and asked her the same question. She looked down her nose at him and said, “What? I don’t know?”

He got the feeling that she was checking whether he really wanted to know and whether it was safe to tell him. He gently and politely persisted. Eventually he found the right question: “When was the last time you knew your Dad loved you?”

She took her time to reply, “I don’t know... maybe when I won the 200m and you said I was a good sportswoman.”

She said it in a half-mocking, too-cool-to-care tone, but it was the truth. She obviously liked being appreciated and noticed.

He said, “Well I do love you a lot, and I obviously need to show it better. How could I do that?”

He saw her mask slip for a minute and she actually told him what she wanted. “I wish you had more time to take me more places.”

“OK”, he said. And to his credit, he actually followed up. The next weekend he drove her to a friend’s party, and to the beach with the rest of the family. He even drove her to school a couple of mornings that week. He says the result was they started talking about her music, her friends, her entertainment, her ambitions – her life. He realised he had barely known her, but started to appreciate what a great kid she really was. He didn’t come on heavy with the advice, and so eventually she started asking his opinion.

If only it were always that easy... Not all children are that easy to get back in touch with. Some have been hurt and closed down for years. Some parents have simply assumed that the children must feel loved, just because they know they feel love for them.

There are only five basic ways human beings give and receive love, and each individual has one or two that really fill their love tank. The trick is to find these for your children.

(See topic 7 of the Relationships course, where these principles are applied to marriage.)

Five ways to show love

1. Words of Affirmation

For example, “You ran really well at the park.” “You were nice to look after your little sister.” “You’re a good kid.” “You’re a pretty little angel.”

Your words can let your children know you love them, and can make them love you. Make sure they are tailor-made words that notice what’s so good about them as individuals. Even when teenagers seem to “go underground” emotionally for a while and don’t respond, it’s still wise to keep giving in this way.

With young children, you can play the “I like how you...” game. You have to tell them something you like about them, then they tell you one they like about you. You’ll get some great ones back. (“You have nice white teeth like a wolf.” “You’re the funniest.”) And you can throw outrageous compliments at them. This game is a fun way to get a family showing love.

2. Quality Time

There is no substitute for this, no-one else can do it for you, and no product you can buy to replace it. We parents are tempted by excuses like, “We don’t spend much time, but we spend quality time.” Really, what does that mean? Children can’t be scheduled: “OK, it’s 8pm, so we need to drop what we’re doing and get all relaxed and open-hearted with Dad for 20 minutes.” It doesn’t happen like that.

Unstructured time is often the most productive of questions, deep talks and bonding. Building a friendship takes time – relaxed time just to horse around. Psychologist Steve Biddulph goes hard and specific on this point: “If you routinely work a fifty-five or sixty-hour week, including travel times, you just won’t cut it as a dad [or mum]. Your [children] will have problems in life, and it will be down to you. Fathers [and mothers] need to get home in time to play, laugh, teach and tickle their children... Often fathers find that the answer is to accept a lower income... Next time you’re offered a ‘promotion’ involving longer hours and more nights away from home, seriously consider telling your boss, ‘Sorry, my children come first.’¹

You know he’s right. What are you going to do about it? And don’t say you’ll start next week.

- Focussed Attention - The other day in a play-time with my daughter, I got to thinking about work. A couple of minutes later I noticed she had wandered off. She must have gotten bored with a Dad who wasn't really there. I went after her and said, "Sorry, honey, I was thinking about work, but I've stopped." I gently got into what she was doing rather than demanding that she snap to attention now that His Lordship had come back. Soon we were having a ball again.
- Energy - It's not enough to use all your energy at work and be sleepy or grumpy at home. Researchers hear children saying that this is the biggest thing.
- Listening - Don't forget eye contact and posture, and act on some of the suggestions you hear.
- One-on-one time - It's great to play with all your children together, but mix in some time with each alone. Then they can tell you their particular problems.
- Conversation skills - A lot of people put on a charming face for strangers but are grumpy at home. Charm your family.

It's easier the earlier you start. They are most flexible when they're not at school yet, and starting early gets you in the habit of putting family time above work or other commitments.

3. Gifts

It doesn't have to be a convertible (either doll size or adult size). This is not about breaking the bank, it's about them feeling remembered. A tiny gift, like a cuddly Kiwi or koala from your trip, means, "Mum thought of me while she was away."

4. Acts of Service

Some children say the most loved they ever felt was when their Mum cooked them their favourite meal, or their Dad helped them do up an old car, or their parents took turns being by their bed when they were sick for a week. These are ways to show how much you feel for your children. Are they demanding and exhausting? Absolutely. When children try to say they love you by doing acts of service, it's important to appreciate them. Even if you didn't want toast and baked beans for breakfast, or your car windows washed with a slightly dirty rag, be grateful.

5. Physical Touch

You may have heard about orphanages after World War I where babies who had everything – food, cleanliness, health care – simply shrivelled up and died. Researchers worked out that they were lacking hugs and touch and physical affection. That is now seen as a basic need for children. (I think it's vital for adults as well.)

There are so many ways to touch children appropriately. Pat them on the back, massage their feet and shoulders, stroke their hair or face, tickle them, carry them around, swing

them round the lawn, sit cuddled up in bed reading, watch TV with them sitting on your knee or leaning on your legs, brush their hair, give them horsey rides on your back, rumble and wrestle them.

I hug children - my own and other people's. These days it can be misunderstood because people are so worried about abuse, and you need some clear rules:

- Only if they invite it. You can ask, "Would you like a hug?" (If they say no, that's fine too.)
- In public, not in private.
- More side-on than front-on if they are older.
- In groups, not selectively.
- As a playful wrestle if they're older boys.

I'll never forget working with a young woman who had been sexually abused. She realised she couldn't remember a "proper hug", and asked for one from me. I felt this was not exactly a textbook way to behave, but I hugged her on a busy street. She said, "It was nice to be hugged by someone who doesn't want to take something from me."

1. *Raising Boys*, p.14, but the principle applies to both genders.

Stupid Love

Of course there are some love limitations around:

- Seductiveness and crossing sexual boundaries. You may rationalise that they don't understand, or that you are just giving children safe experience or teaching them, or that they started it, but that would be kidding yourself. Sexual play with children is violating their trust and doing serious long-term damage. Even if they do act seductively or even come on to you sexually, you are the adult, legally and morally obliged to act responsibly. If you are crossing boundaries, stop before it gets worse. Seek help from a counsellor urgently.
- Clinginess and smothering. These might make a parent feel oh-so-loving and wonderful, but they carry a message that the child is weak and useless and needy. Many children get frustrated and rebellious, while others become dependent under this kind of love.
- Performance-based love. Some parents find it hard to like children when they are disobedient, weak, sick or unsuccessful at something. Perhaps they have been raised to feel that they are lovable only when they are doing well. This is not balanced love. You may need to seek counselling about it yourself.
- Manipulative love. "I will love you if..." These words may never actually be said, but the child is made to feel that love is conditional on behaviour. This makes them less secure, and more likely to tell you where to go with your approval.

Let's leave the last word to an expert on preventing addiction:

The child's foremost need is an adequate supply of wise love. By 'wise' I mean steady and natural, instead of sporadic and forced; unsentimental and geared to growing autonomy [independence] instead of plaintive [needy and pleading] and smothering.

-David Roberts, *Psychotherapy and the Christian View of Man*, quoted in Howard Clinebell (1998) *Understanding and Counselling Persons with Alcohol, Drug and Behavioural Addictions*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, p.60

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LESSON 11 - Communicating With Your Children

One of the top ten stressors for father's was coming home from work and having to talk with their children! Learn 4 great tips for how to best communicate with the kids. Find out about how to listen carefully (for feelings) to what they are really trying to tell you in *little people language*. Understand what strategies to use for liars. Encounter ways to teach them to fight fairly, without resorting to violence or verbal abuse. Children love to talk. They'd just love you to talk back and be more interested in their world!

If your child has severe industrial deafness that is miraculously cured when you whisper about ice cream, don't despair.

You don't have to buy a cattle prod or develop lungs like Pavarotti. There are other strategies to restore communication.

Imagine you come home and say, "I had a tough day at work." What if your partner said, "Oh there there, you poor little fella." What if they said, "Right, I'm picking up that phone right now and I'm going to tell your boss a thing or two."

Or, "Aw no, I've told you before, what you should do is..." Or, "Let's watch some TV." You know how you'd feel. So why do some parents think patronising, taking over, lecturing or distracting is what their children want when they talk? What about listening? Encourage them to talk. Understand and empathise. Listen actively, check that you understand, then keep quiet for about 3 times longer than you think they need to get to the point. This kind of listening is a great example for your children. Perhaps it's the first step in helping them communicate.

How Do You Talk To Children?

None of what follows is radically new. It's just reminding us parents to treat children as people - because they are. (What a radical idea!)

I Said, TIDY YOUR ROOM!

How do you talk so children will listen? Here are some tips.

- Don't ever be rude, but be assertive. (See Relationships topic 6 for a reminder of what assertiveness is, as opposed to aggressiveness or submissiveness.)
- Use their name (After all, you gave it to them.) Use the whole name if you really want to have serious effect.
- Politely demand to be heard, and reinforce this. Stop. Physically remove any distractions. Mute the TV or turn off whatever electronic gadget you need to. Touch them lightly if necessary (no pinching or punching, even on the first day of the month). This is better than shouting for many reasons. It teaches your children to listen to normal speech, not just shouting. It's less stressful for you. And the neighbours will thank you.
- Control yourself. Am I the only one who has watched a father bellowing, "CALM DOWN!!!" I wanted to walk up and say, "Why don't you show them how?" (But I didn't say that. I like my nose the shape it is.)
- Make sure you have their attention before you start. Don't shout from another room without checking if they have headphones on or are concentrating on TV or homework. You wouldn't respond to that.
- Don't talk too much. Don't launch into a full account of your day, your family history and the meaning of life before telling them you'd like them to come for dinner. Get to the point.
- Don't talk down to them or over their heads. Make your requests clear, simple and age-appropriate. For example, if you tell a 3-year old, "Sit quietly for 5 minutes", that's not clear. Does "quietly" mean they can talk without shouting, and keep playing as long as they're sitting down? How long is five minutes anyway? And what's in it for them?
- Don't repeat yourself. If they've already heard you, expect action or else you are teaching them that they can wait for the second or third nagging before they have to respond. Consistently move to make it happen first time.
- Train them to reply. It's basic politeness and good teamwork, even if it's just, "OK, Dad."
- Watch your tone. The way you say things can carry subtle messages: "You're not going to listen, are you?" "You're a bit dumb." "You make me angry." "I'm

confident that you can do this.” “You’re a good kid – you just need to know what to do.”

- Be courteous. Too many parents speak to their children as they would never speak to anyone else and call it “discipline”. It’s pretty stupid and comical when a parent screams, “I’ll teach you to talk to me like that!!!” I think, “Yes, it seems you’ve already taught them.”
- Expect courtesy in return, and politely assert until you get it.
- Talk them up. I well remember one teacher who had the amazing knack of making a telling off sound like a compliment. He’d say, “That’s not the sort of behaviour I’d expect from someone as intelligent as you.” Or, “I’m sure you’re capable of much better than this. Are you having a problem right now? Is there some way I can help you to try harder?” That brought major change in some of us, and we still liked him afterwards. That strategy is much wiser than saying, “You’re such an idiot”, or “You’re just like your Uncle Fred, and he’s in prison.”
- No put-downs, even joking ones, especially in a stressful situation.
- Humour is fantastic. Laugh at yourself and take the stress out of tense situations by a good chuckle. Be very careful laughing at your child unless they really need to lighten up.
- Be a good listener **yourself**. They will learn only by watching you, not just by what you say.

The best listeners:

- face the speaker (when they can – don’t try it while driving)
- turn their bodies towards you
- don’t try to think about something else at the same time

(You might want to re-read the Relationships topic 4 on Communication.)

Listen for Feelings

- Get into their world, starting when they are tiny. “Is teddy’s sore knee better now, doctor?” (Don’t always play the Big Bad Wolf or you’ll become typecast in bad guy roles, and they’ll spend good money on therapy.) When they’re teenagers, be interested in them. Who is their favourite band? What do they sing? Who are their best friends? Their favourite teachers? How do they feel about themselves? What do they struggle with?
- Invite them into your world too. Show them what you do at work. Let them meet your friends. Answer their questions about when you were young – it will remind them that you weren’t born ancient. As well, it reminds you of what was important to you when you were that age.
- Express your feelings in appropriate ways, and train them that it’s OK to discuss feelings. This is especially hard for males in our culture, so give them special help.
- Don’t interrogate. When you are shining the desk lamp in their eyes and saying, “Ve haff vays of makink you talk”, you are not building happy relationships. Neither does hard cross-examination. Of course, there are times when you need to play detective – for ex., about drugs. Even then, subtle is better than heavy most times.
- Have a few secret signals within the family. Work out a coded way to say things like, “This person is hassling me but I don’t want to come out and say it. Help!” Or, “Get me out of this situation with my dignity intact.” (Just don’t use these to play poker.)
- Have a regular time for a relaxed talk, for example, bedtime. One man said he grew up in a family of five, but his mother managed to find time for him alone every night before bedtime. She kept it up right into his teens, and it helped him through some rough patches. It also helped make him a good communicator, and his wife is very grateful. He now practises the bedtime chat with his children. If he is away on business, he phones up, allowing for time zones, to chat before bedtime.
- Read their body language and respond to it.
- Listen for feelings.
- Keep confidences. The only possible exceptions are sexual abuse, which you have a duty to encourage them to report, and drugs and other serious illegality. You need to tell your children that you would act on these confidences. But even if you feel you are conscience-bound to break a confidence, do so with the minimum embarrassment to your child. & Don’t blow their trust.
- Treat questions seriously.
- Write notes for the lunch boxes. One friend’s mother is famous for this.
- Be a letter writer. One father always sits down between Christmas and New Year and writes each member of his family “The Official New Year Letter”. He reminisces about their year, congratulating and encouraging, and finishes by telling them what he most appreciates about them. & His children say that in down moments, they often pull out their Dad’s letter and remind themselves that they must be good people because they have it in writing. One day those letters will be priceless memories.

What Can You Do About Lying?

Have you ever told a whopper?

(Oh go on, tell the truth now!) Why did you do it?

Probably for a reason similar to one on the following list of reasons why children lie:

- To avoid punishment or loss.
- To avoid losing people's respect and affection.
- Wanting to impress and not thinking the real you was good enough (due to low self-esteem).
- Copying family members. (Ouch!)

Lying behaviour varies with age:

- Children under three rarely lie because they believe parents can read their minds. If they tell tall stories, it's probably because they honestly believe them. Some of them still believe in Santa Claus.
- At about 3 or 4 they may start experimenting with imaginative stories. "Spud did it, not me." A good way to ask for the truth is to keep it light and fun, "Are you only joking?"
- School-age children may lie because they hate to make you mad and lose your approval. They know they're fibbing, but may reason that it's kind.
- Teenagers may lie because they want privacy and independence, or freedom to do what they want.

So what can you do about lying?

- Set a good example yourself. Dodgy children often mean dodgy parents.
- Never ask them to lie for you. If they answer the phone and you hear who it is and don't want to talk, be careful. If you whisper, "Say I'm not home", you're giving them a lesson in lying. It's wiser to shake your head, having first arranged that this means they should say, "Sorry, Mum/Dad's not available right now. Can I take your number?"
- Catch them telling the truth and praise them to the skies. If you do this a number of times, telling them they are honest children, they may well live up to it.
- Teach them the difference between fiction and truth. Start early with story books and TV. "Is that a real story?"
- Avoid direct questions if possible. Don't say, "Did you hit your sister?" Say, "Why did you hit your sister?" (This is an old police trick.)
- Don't ever call them a liar. They might believe you.
- If they lie, stop them and say, "What I'd like you to do is tell me the truth."
- In punishment situations, reward them for telling the truth by lightening their sentence. "For hitting your brother like that, you'd usually get a week with no TV. But you told me the truth under pressure and that was very good, so I'll reduce your punishment to three days."

- Don't ask teenagers too many questions. Of course you should ask some questions – you have the right because of your responsibility to protect them. But leave them some privacy.
- Seek counselling if the problem persists.

Teach Them To Fight Fair

Relax, this is not about karate. Verbal fights are not ideal and can be damaging, but they are a part of communication because they allow face-to-face moments of honesty that clear out built-up resentment or misunderstanding.

When your children fight each other, you can use that situation as a teaching opportunity.

Why do children fight?

- They may be fighting for attention, love and “their place in the sun”. Make sure you give them all enough time. For example, older children need special attention when a new baby arrives. Dad might take them out to buy a new outfit or toy for themselves and one that will be their gift for the new baby. When they give the gift to the new baby, tell them what a good big brother/sister they are.
- Often an older child will pick on a younger one who they feel is favoured. When parents defend the younger child all the time, the older child will feel even more alone. If this is happening, a positive solution would be simply putting more time and attention into the older child.
- They may be fighting boundary wars as countries still do. The best way to sort that out is by working out clearly where the borders are. Allow children boundaries such as the right to say, “No” and “That’s mine” and “I don’t want to” and the right not to be touched, poked, tickled or even their “air space” invaded if they don’t want. If they can’t work out the boundaries, you might need to.
- Boundaries are lines we draw to decide who we are, what we will and won’t do. They define our limits, our independence, our responsibility – our selves.

How can you prevent fights?

- Crack down on name-calling.
- Teach them to share. One trick is to let the person who goes second on the swings have a longer ride.
- If you have three children, make sure one is not always the odd one out.
- Don’t compare them. If you say, “Why can’t you? Your brother did at your age!” The child will feel discouraged and less likely to try – and will hate the brother into the bargain.
- If you step in, make sure you are not upset. Wait till you are calm.
- If you are playing judge, make sure you listen to both sides fairly. You don’t want to teach them that life is unjust and bad behaviour may be ignored or even rewarded.
- Rather than always playing judge, ask them how they would sort out the problem. Brainstorm together and agree on a win-win solution.
- Don’t treat them all the same. You don’t have to be 100% equal, just fair.
- Be very careful with labelling that goes on unless it’s positive. “Tammy is our star gymnast, and Danny is our swimming torpedo”, is fine, but “Andy has a bad temper” is not.
- Teach children to sit down and have an "all-out-in-the-open" session. Model keeping yourself cool, asking questions, checking you understand, validating feelings (“I can see you’re upset about this”), even if you don’t think they are making sense.

Sources & Recommended Reading:

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LESSON 12 - Discipline: Love and Limits

Ever been amazed at huge temper tantrums by kids who's parents seem unfazed? Will those kids grow up to be terrorists? Discipline is *not* a dirty word! But it is the thing that most parents get wrong. In one generation it was overdone and then the next one comes along and let's it slip! What are the aims, limits and boundaries of real discipline for children? Learn 3 methods for effective control and what are the worst way to discipline kids. Finally understand where forgiveness and reconciliation fit into the world of a child. And remember that loving discipline should always be redemptive.



The toddling terminator has been trashing your lounge-room as his parents sat there, allowing him to “be an individual”. “Just a phase,” says his mother airily as she gives in to another tantrum.

Your children watch, horrified. “Perfectly natural”, trills his father. “No doubt he’ll grow into a terrorist,” you say, but only to yourself.

Your three-year old daughter sits beside you in a restaurant, eating neatly and chatting. “Daddy, could I have some more juice, please?” You hear a murmur of approval pass around the restaurant: “Ohhh!” A dozen people look ready to adopt such a charming and courteous child. You feel like father of the year.

What's the difference between nightmare and dream? Children have different personalities, activity levels, genes etc. But the major difference is discipline.

Discipline: Not a Dirty Word

Many people hear the word discipline and think of an angry father thrashing a child with his belt, or a Mum screaming put-downs at a toddler in a supermarket. They think discipline equals punishment.

But discipline really just means training – punishment is only a last resort.

Good discipline actually helps a child develop to their full potential because you love them. What's negative about that? And what's positive about letting children be whining, tantrum-throwing bad sports, dependent fuss-pots, bullies or unthinking “red cordial children” with the attention span of a gnat? How is that helping them to enjoy happy, successful lives and be the great people they could be? And what does it inflict on the civilised world?

Don't think that discipline demands you must be harsh, verbally attacking or physically violent. It includes punishment at times, but ideally it is mainly positive. Its aim is to give your child control over themselves so that they can achieve in all areas of life.

Discipline is ineffective and even damaging if the child's “love tank” is empty. There's a great scene in *The Lion King* where Simba has just disobeyed his father and gone into dangerous territory, nearly losing his life and his girlfriend's life. His father rescues him with awesome strength and, seeing Simba is grateful and very sorry for his disobedience, he walks home talking quietly with him, stopping on the way for a play wrestle. This wrestle is a fun way to show physical affection to his son, and tell him without words that he is loved and valuable. It also demonstrates the father's power, subtly saying that this power will be used against bad behaviour if necessary. The father never hurts him, and this strong self-control models what he wants for his son. That's great discipline.

Great parenting brings out the best from the child, developing them to their full potential. This involves developing choices, skills and attitudes like these:

- My feelings matter and deserve to be respected, but I'm responsible for them.
- Other people have feelings, and I need to treat them as I would like to be treated.
- I know what I want, but I won't always expect to get it. The world doesn't revolve around me.
- I am strong and secure enough to wait sometimes.
- I think before I act. I understand consequences and respect laws and authority while thinking for myself.

What Discipline Includes

Discipline involves a much wider range of activities than you might first think:

1. Meeting needs

Some bad behaviour is a result of unmet needs. If a child is hungry, tired, out of routine, bored or over-stimulated, misbehaviour is predictable. There are some situations you can't avoid, but as a rule you can save yourself a lot of discipline headaches by anticipating what children need. Are they going on a long car trip? Pack drinks, toys, and favourite music. Allow a quiet time when they normally sleep, and breaks so they can get some exercise and pump some endorphins.

And many children act up because they feel insecure and even unloved. The "adolescent brat" who needles his brother may be a person who does not feel anyone really cares or understands. That may be why he can't "wipe that smirk off" his face when he is disciplined – he's enjoying the attention, because negative attention is better than none.

(See Topic 10 "The Psychology of Love".)

2. Modelling & Teaching

Modelling doesn't mean strutting the catwalk. It means setting a good example in everyday life. And teaching is simply adding words to that.

Parenthood is a scary moral wake-up call. One father (who lives a million miles from here) remembers speeding through an orange light that turned rather pinkish. A little voice piped up from the back, "Red mean stop." Ah, yes. Bluntly, if you swear, drive stupidly, cheat, lie, smoke, rebel against sensible rules or authorities, explode with anger, or dope yourself on drugs, don't be surprised if they do too.

3. Goal-Setting, Motivating

Most parents think of discipline as saying what a child cannot do. But encouragement is the best discipline. Telling a child they are well-behaved, intelligent, sporty, sociable, and keeping a vision of success clear in their minds, is a positive way to make it happen. Of course you should not make your love and appreciation conditional on them achieving in all areas. You should also make sure that the goals are compatible with their personality, talents and interests, so as to avoid frustration and disappointment all round.

4. Advice and Requests

These are the basics of respectful leadership. OK, we all know you have the power and you could command the child to obey, but requesting is more positive.

- It respects their feelings.
- It enlists their intelligence.
- It calls them a good person who will do the sensible thing.
- It teaches them to cooperate.
- It models politeness.

5. Instructions & commands.

These are for situations where there is one correct response. For example, if the dog has not been fed for a day, then it just has to be done without any room for personal opinions. Commands are for emergencies (“Run!!”), and for those times when requests and instructions are ignored, and a child is testing whether you really mean what you say. Commands will be even more effective if they are used sparingly. Some insecure parents overuse commands because they feel insecure in their role and do not expect their requests will be respected. Children soon see through this and learn to ignore a shouting parent.

6. Gentle physical control.

Children are built small so that they can simply be removed from a situation, or put where they need to be. Imagine:

“James, would you put that jar back on the shelf now, please.” (Request.)

“Not yet.” (Request refused.)

“James, put it back right now.” (Command)

No answer. (Command ignored.)

Some parents would smack immediately, but it may be wiser simply to pick him up, take the jar and put it back. (Gentle physical control.) As children grow up, physical removal gets more difficult – and hopefully less necessary.

7. Punishment

This is the last resort. Punishment needs to:

- Be for the child's benefit, not just to make you feel better. If you feel hurt or devalued and want the little brat to pay, then you should not punish. Say, "We'll talk about this later", and go and cool down till you think clearly. You'll be glad you did.
- Be fair. Justice demands everyone is innocent till proven guilty, and must receive a fair hearing.
- Fit the crime. If a child sprays graffiti on a neighbour's wall, let them clean it off. If children are punished just as harshly for little things, they will figure they might as well do big things.
- Fit the child. Some children will love being sent to their room. Others will feel it is hell.
- Be consistent. Of course we are all human, and moods, tensions, sickness, marital conflict etc affect us all at times. But punishment should not vary wildly depending how you feel. You may be wise to sit down and draw up a list of punishments when you are cool.

Here Are Some Methods

1. Stand and think

You put the child into a quiet corner and ask them to think. You ask them courteously and quietly: What did you do wrong? What should you have done? Can you do that now? If necessary, could you say sorry to [whoever]?

These questions get them thinking about their mistake without heavy confrontation. They also train them to expect these questions next time, and eventually to think them. Hopefully they say sorry without having to grovel.

2. Consequences

Discipline aims at making the consequences of silly actions catch up with the child so that they learn to reason about cause and effect. You might add extra jobs (for example, "You can say sorry to your sister and pull out all the weeds in the back rose beds, please.") or restrictions, or withdrawal of privileges (for example, "Sorry, but your skateboard will be locked in my car boot for the next week.")

3. To smack or not to smack?

This is a controversial question and we're not going to lay down the law. One ex-Army heavyweight boxing champion said his father used to flog him with a rope and his mother used to tell him quietly that he was a good boy and mustn't let himself down by bad behaviour. He said his mother had much more impact, and he feared disappointing her much more than he feared his father's belt. Then again, many men old enough to remember getting the cane at school will tell you (in moments of truth) that it "smartened them up".

They would argue that the human bottom is well padded and seems naturally suited for the occasional smack from an open hand without any real harm. They claim that, as a last resort, a smack is a decisive final word and a good way to clear the air and bring closure so that everyone can move on.

If you decide to smack, only aim for bottoms - never swing at heads or faces. Little bodies are precious, so never use a fist or other hard object or do anything else that borders on abuse. Don't smack in anger or for your own feelings, but genuinely for their benefit. When it's finished, it's finished - give them a hug and move on to something good. Some parents say they've smacked their children only 2 or 3 times in their lives, but knowing it was possible helped motivate them at stubborn times. And do it as a last resort - keep looking for other creative discipline methods.

Foolish Discipline

There are definitely wrong ways to discipline children.

If parts of this list start your red lights flashing, please don't see it as criticism but as a suggestion:

- Making threats that don't happen. You need to follow through or they won't believe you next time.
- Punishing in anger. This actually teaches a child how to lose control. And you might really hurt them. In extreme cases, this can lead to hospitalization, to children being taken into other care, and even to death (for example, shaking babies).
- Ignoring worsening behaviour, then suddenly dropping a bomb on them. It's wiser to challenge them gradually before things get right out of hand.
- Inconsistency. If children work out that they will get away with misbehaviour half the time, they may think it's worth the risk.
- Extremes. When the child is very afraid or angry, they cannot think clearly.
- Parents divided. Children will soon find and exploit any gaps between parents. They'll say, "But Mum said yes!" – and suddenly they're playing "Divide and rule" games. But this actually makes children feel insecure – if Mum and Dad can't work things out, how will they? Even if two parents have different views, it's better to agree on a position. If you disagree with how your partner is handling the situation, tell them later (unless someone's about to be harmed).
- Too many rules. Children can't carry a huge law code around in their heads. If God summarised morality in Ten Commandments, you shouldn't need many more family rules.
- Rules without reasons. "Because I said so" is fine if you're trying to teach them to obey in emergencies, but you also want to teach them to think and reason.
- Age-inappropriate rules. If they're too advanced, the child feels silly. Too babyish and the teenager feels disrespected.
- Inappropriate body language. You may be feeling angry or sad for other reasons, but don't make your child feel they're to blame. Watch your tone and facial expression.
- Bad timing. Don't discipline at meal times, unless it's an emergency.
- Not moving on. Don't let punishment and anger stay hanging over everyone's heads like a nuclear missile threat. Change the mood to positive co-operation as soon as you can.
- Rewarding bad behaviour. You've seen a child ask a parent to buy them a toy, and then throw a wobbly when they won't. The poor guilty parent, desperately trying to be nice, gives in and buys the toy. And the child thinks, "Ah, that worked. Next time they say no, I'll tantrum again." Other rewards include more attention or pleasant distractions (a fun activity, food or drink).
- "Wait till your father gets home." Old-fashioned thinking suggests one nurturing parent and one tough parent, usually the father. Yet ancient wisdom suggests a

balanced role for fathers: “Fathers ... bring them up with nurture and discipline”¹ – the gentle and the tough. This models a complete, balanced personality.

- Not listening.
- Do as I say, not as I do.

1. Paul, *The New Testament*, [Ephesians 6:4](#)

The Last Word

After a discipline situation, it's vital that you offer forgiveness and reconciliation.

Of course the child needs to understand what they did wrong and be genuinely sorry. Pretending to be sorry, or being sorry about getting caught, doesn't train them at all. But a child who is really sorry does not need further punishment. The matter should be over. They don't have to keep saying sorry or "paying" for their mistakes in subtle ways, but should receive open-hearted approval and affection.

Forgiveness is the ability to lose guilty feelings and live above past mistakes – a very important life skill. Some people have suffered when religion is used to increase guilt, hoping this will motivate people. Yet God uses a very different strategy: complete forgiveness, a command to "forget those things which are behind and go forward positively to your goal."²

Parents can show children how to give and receive forgiveness. If we make mistakes, we only win points when we apologise to our children.

Questions

- How were you disciplined as a child?
- What approaches worked on you?
- What does that say about your personality?
- What do you think will work on your children?

Sources & Recommended Reading

- Parenting: the most important job in the world, www.community.nsw.gov.au
- Steve Biddulph, *The Secret of Happy Children*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1995
- Steve Biddulph, *More Secrets of Happy Children*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1996
- Mathew R Sanders, *Every parent; A Positive Approach to children's Behaviour*, Addison-Wesley, Australia 1992.

2. Paul, *The New Testament*, [Philippians 3:13](#).

LESSON 13 - Preventing Addiction

One major concern for parents today is worrying about what substances are being offered to their children. Why do people do drugs? Learn about 4 different types of users and 5 ways in which it is best to prevent addictions. The big 3 are *Anger, Sadness and Fear*. How do you successfully manage these with the kids? What are some features of an addictive lifestyle. Can our children inherit our lifestyle addictions? Discover how to keep them safe.

It's a major concern for parents. When they're not worrying about their children being beaten up or robbed, they're worried about drugs.

Why do people do drugs?

For many reasons:

1. Recreational users

They're usually **young people looking for fun**. Some manage to escape addiction, but the vulnerable ones get addicted and go down the tubes amazingly quickly. Why are some people vulnerable? It could be genetic, family example, cultural, or they could have an "addictive personality".

Positive alternatives:

- Educate young people that total avoidance is the only sure way of protecting someone who's vulnerable (which may be you);
- Give opportunities for fun and natural highs.

2. Rebellious users

Adolescents often try drugs so they will be accepted by their peer group, or to try to **discover their own identity** apart from parents, teachers etc.

Positive alternatives:

- Try to steer them into a positive peer group, and towards other responsible young adults who'll guide them through any phase when they think their parents are stupid.

3. Maladjusted users

These are people young and old who are trying to escape bad feelings caused by loneliness, failure, shame, guilt, conflict in relationships (their own or their parents').

Positive alternatives:

- Readily available counselling, and parents who listen and have built up a quality relationship with them over time.

4. Extreme cases

These are **profoundly disturbed personalities**, often addicted to anything and everything. They need psychiatric help, or else at least harm minimisation. If a child fits this category, call a social worker fast.

Then there are people in painful poverty or racial oppression. They need the chance to meet their primary needs of food and shelter through social and community work (if only that were as easy as it sounds!)

The Addiction Cycle

The thing they all have in common is that they are trying to change their mood – how they feel.



If you look at the addiction cycle, it is a jagged line. It starts flat, then the drug is taken and the person's mood soars up. But then it quickly falls away, ending even lower than it was before. And so they need another drug to get them back up to an acceptable level.

Eventually they need the drug to feel normal. Then its effect is lessened, and they need more. Eventually even a high dose still does not raise them high enough, and they are in serious trouble – that's if they're still alive at all.

In simple terms, addiction is emotional. It's about how you feel.

This topic will look at what you can do to give your children a strong emotional life so that they don't need drugs.

Preventing Addiction

There are no guarantees, but the following can vastly improve a child's chances.

1. Meet their psychological and emotional needs

Remember this quote?

The child's foremost need is an adequate supply of wise love. By 'wise' I mean steady and natural, instead of sporadic and forced; unsentimental and geared to growing autonomy [independence] instead of plaintive [needy and pleading] and smothering.

- David Roberts¹.

For more detail, see topic #10 on "The Psychology of Love." This is definitely not airy-fairy love talk.

2. Model and teach relationship skills

Addicts tend to be lonely people. They have "drug buddies", who are no real buddies at all. They tend to love only their addiction, as the songs say: "Red, red wine, stay close to me" or "I only love you, Mary Jane". So why didn't someone teach them how to communicate and connect with people in satisfying ways?

3. Build self-esteem

(This is a topic in itself, which we can only introduce here².) Self-esteem is built by positive relationships ("That cool older person likes me"), affirmations ("Thank-you for being an honest boy – you're great like that"), winning attitudes ("I can do it" rather than, "What's the use of trying?"), achievements and doing useful things. It can also come from a belief system ("God made me, loves me, and has a plan for my life", rather than, "I'm a cosmic accident and there's no-one up there to give a toss about me".)

Good self-esteem can handle:

- some faults and limitations in yourself – you still deserve love.
- some disapproval from others – they may be wrong.
- some periods without a romantic relationship – they're great, but I am still a whole person.
- unfairness in the world – you won't always get what you want.
- not proving yourself all the time.

For a readable and accurate book on this, see Susan Tanner and Jillian Ball, *Beating the Blues: A Self-Help Approach to Overcoming Depression*, Sydney: Doubleday, 1991.

4. Model and teach good stress management

Again a whole topic in itself³, but many addicts first turned to drugs to escape stressful situations. (Not that drugs help them fix these situations – in fact, they usually make them worse.)

5. Teach them how to handle their emotions

Well, how? Again, the best way is example. They are watching you. That doesn't have to be scary. You don't have to be ashamed of your emotions, or hide them under an unbelievably calm voice and a happy face as though everything is lovely. Just express them appropriately. If you don't feel confident you know what that is, get some tips from a counsellor or a good book.

1. Psychotherapy and the Christian View of Man, quoted in Howard Clinebell (1998) *Understanding and Counselling Persons with Alcohol, Drug and Behavioural Addictions*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, p.60

2. You might want to check out childparenting.about.com

3. See for example Peter Hanson (1989) *Stress for Success*, Pan, London, 1989.

The Big Three

Meanwhile, here are some tips on the “big three”:

Anger

It can be useful for defending ourselves and making us right wrongs, but it can explode into verbal abuse or violence.

You can teach children to:

- Think about why they are angry, before they simply react.
- Use words, not fists.
- Make their feelings heard in a way that makes them most likely to be understood (whether or not this changes the situation). This means no shouting, swearing, rude demands or verbal abuse. Turn anger into positive statements of what they want.
- Seek resolution, not be emotionally or physically threatening.
- Focus their anger on the right thing: the source
- Stick to the issue. Don't have a general rage about anything and everything else.

One harmful way to express anger is passive-aggressiveness. You see this in children when they quietly rebel. They are stubborn for no reason – except frustrating an authority figure. You can acknowledge their feelings while also politely letting them know that their inappropriate behaviour will not change your decision.

There is also a form of pseudo-anger: **the tantrum**.

Dealing with Tantrums

- Never let them have any rewards or wins as a result of a tantrum. If this makes you feel like a horrible person, check your self-esteem. Are you depending too much on the child's approval?
- Deal with the immediate problem. It can be hard to walk away when a child is rolling around a shopping centre aisle and 10 people are staring at you like you're a horrible parent.
- Don't let them get away with it - give them some punishment afterwards.
- Some writers suggest you should move first, going into a “mock charge” before they can, using your most forceful and angry voice. Maybe, but one great teacher I know says too many parents scream at their children and then do nothing, so children learn to discount yelling. She drops her voice and whispers like a hired assassin with no emotions, cool as 007 about to pull the trigger – I've seen angry, undisciplined children feel the fear of Zeus and stop the tantrum!

The Big Three

Sadness

Sadness is no fun but it can actually be useful – it releases endorphins and removes stress.

How can you help children deal with it?

- Simply be there as a calm presence.
- Acknowledge how they're feeling. ("Yes, it is sad about your dog, old pal.")
- Don't try to stop them too soon. It's important that boys be allowed to cry without being called a sook. "Jesus wept." It's the shortest verse in the Bible (4) , but it says a lot. If the role model cried, it's OK. (*He was crying for a dead friend.*)

There is also a form of false sadness: the sulk. You don't want them to grow up with this habit!

Sulking only works if it makes the parent (or other target) feel guilty. Your first instinct may be to rush in and try to cheer the poor dears up, or try to charm them out of it with your amazing personality. But that only encourages them to sulk again.

One brilliant tactic is to say, "I want to help you. When you work out what you want, come and see me", and then leave.

Then the child learns some hard truths

- that grumping will not change the world
- that life does not always give us what we want
- that people help you only if you ask clearly and nicely for what you want.

Fear

Fear has its uses too – it can be an inbuilt early warning system. It makes you think hard and move fast. Yet too much fear limits your life.

The best way to handle fear is with logical thought and reasoning. Don't poo-hoo a child's fears. Listen to them, but then give reasons why their fear will not be a problem, and even logical steps. ("No cars have ever crashed through a house in our street. But if one did, it would be stopped by the stones on the front porch.") If they seem obsessed by a fear, look for something behind it.

There is a pseudo-fear: **shyness**. Biddulph suggests that to break the habit, children can be simply told to say the hello and use the person's name. A full conversation may be too much to ask. And they certainly should not be forced to hug or kiss someone if they don't want to. It's important to teach them early that they have the right to say no to physical touch. Leave those boundaries intact.

4. The New Testament, [John 11:35](#).

An Addictive Lifestyle

I'll never forget a cartoon showing two old guys standing in the pub with a beer and a smoke and saying, "I dunno, young people and drugs..."

You can be addicted to a surprising range of things, many of which are not harmful in themselves:

- Work. You get a rush from achievement, but then fatigue drops you even lower.
- Gambling. Gamblers are motivated by a high and a low. The high comes from winning, and the low comes from despair at losing and desperation to get the high again.
- Shopping. The high is spending and owning, the low is getting your credit card bill. This low makes some people need to go out to get a high again by more shopping. And so the cycle continues.
- Internet or computer games. The high is escapism or winning. The low includes tiredness, a sore neck, and guilt at living unhealthily.
- Co-dependent relationships. The high is feeling important when you help your partner. The low is when they disappoint you again.
- Sports.
- Food.
- Dieting.
- Religion. The high is devotion. The low is guilt.
- Money, power, hoarding, etc.

Which Lifestyle?

So many of the activities children do are adrenal.

Consider a child's day. He wakes up and drinks a sugary drink, then eats a breakfast cereal with more sugar than a candy bar. He watches a cartoon designed to pump his adrenalin every minute or so with tension, violence, a new bright colour, music, loud voices, and then commercials shout and flash at him. He gets in the car to go to school and plays with his Game Boy, ignoring his mother and sister and trying to escape the dragon, developing only his adrenal glands and his thumb. He sits in school half-awake, because his breakfast carbohydrates are all gone and there is not much flashing or loudness in the classroom. He goes to recess starving and has some chocolate, which raises his sugar levels for a while but drops them even lower than before. At lunch time he could get a bit of exercise, but he doesn't feel up to it – he's fairly fat and unfit, and he doesn't have much physical energy. He decides to sit round talking about last night's TV. His afternoon is like his morning, except for a sport class where the coach tries to whip the boys up with competition. He gets home and flops in front of some electronic entertainment, exchanges the necessary grunts with Mum and maybe Dad, then stays up late watching TV and snacking. He wakes up tired next day to do it all again.

In another country, a boy wakes up at dawn and walks down to the creek for a drink. He comes back and helps his mother with the other children, learning to read their faces and respond to their needs. He eats a simple, natural breakfast then spends time helping his grandfather fish, or his father dig the garden. He may eat a simple lunch, then spends the afternoon playing games and running around with other children, developing amazing fitness and physical skills with friendly competition. He eats dinner with his family, then sits around the fire and listens to some sacred stories. He gets pleasantly tired and drops into bed early.

Which lifestyle is healthier?

To be honest, ours is, but only because we have better health care and food security. But what if you could choose the best of both worlds for your children? I'm not suggesting you drop out and move to a commune. But what if they had some of the *healthy, unprocessed food, outdoor exercise, and sociable belonging of the traditional tribes?*

It doesn't have to be just a dream.

Sources & Recommended Reading:

- *Parenting: the most important job in the world*, www.community.nsw.gov.au
- Steve Biddulph, *The Secret of Happy Children*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1995
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- Howard Clinebell, *Understanding and Counselling Persons with Alcohol, Drug and Behavioural Addictions*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998

LESSON 14 - Successful Families

Some families seem to naturally succeed, whilst others seem to fragment and fall apart. Are there secrets which help a family stick together and work through their issues? This topic comprehensively addresses 13 characteristics of successful families. What are they? What do they do? How do they live? What do they say? When our society today has such popular comedic role models like *The Simpson's* and *The Family Guy*, we might prefer to be able to refer to some moral compass to guide us away from some of the dangers of our modern life.

The little old lady was working in the garden when reporters started arriving at her small house in the country.

Her son had just become President of the USA. "What do you think of your son now, Mrs Eisenhower?"

She stood straight, looked them in the eye and said, "Which one?"

She had three sons. One was a leading lawyer, one was president of a large bank, and the other had been a general and was now president of his country. She was equally proud of them all.

What Is It About Some Families?

1. They encourage and appreciate

A music teacher once said, “As a composer, he is hopeless” – about Beethoven. A newspaper editor once fired a young man because he had “no good ideas” – it was Walt Disney. A 21-year old worker in a store was kept away from customers because his boss said he “didn’t have enough sense” – that was F.W. Woolworth. Yet somehow these famous people overcame the negativity because somebody believed in them, and encouraged them to believe in themselves. Your children will get enough knocks in the world. Make home a safe, positive place.

2. They plan together

Some families do this formally, using a weekly family council. Everyone is able to speak freely about issues that concern them all – goal-setting, priorities for the week, sharing chores, what people need, plans for days off and holidays. Everyone can contribute items to the agenda for discussion. As children get older, they can be given jobs of keeping records and even chairing the meeting, which will be good experience in how to conduct themselves in school councils, board meetings, parliament ... who knows? Family councils keep the family focused and positive.

3. They love unconditionally

The more competitive life gets, the more children need a place where they get unconditional love, attention, time, and have hero status even if they are not top of the class or captain of the team.

4. They have strong values

What are the top ten virtues you’d like to see in your children? Ours would be love, spirituality, kindness, fun, creativity, intelligence, responsibility, determination, consistent work, patience, honesty, wisdom, service. Oops, that’s thirteen - maybe we should list mathematical ability.

The way to build them into your children is to practise them yourself – even in heavy traffic when you’re tired and it’s raining. Even when the waiter just can’t seem to get it right. If you think you’re hiding your attitudes, you’re not – your children pick them up and you’re teaching them to hide their attitudes. This is frightening! But it’s the greatest motivator to live well and try to follow your ideals.

5. They accept and value differences

Dysfunctional families tend to view differences as a threat. If you are different from me, you might be better and how would my self-esteem cope? So we'll all agree that our way is best and everyone else is stupid (and if you disagree, keep quiet or else).

And obviously families are very different. Some people feel a bit of shame that they don't live in a "proper" family with two adults, 2.6 children and a white picket fence. Can they have family values too? Even the Bible – which promotes the highest family values – mentions many different types of families.

The famous children of Israel were born to two wives (who were sisters!) and a couple of servants – a violently conflicted family that somehow produced greatness. The adored queen Esther was an orphan adopted by her childless uncle and aunt. King David's family tree contained a foreigner on her second marriage (Ruth) and an ex-prostitute who had worked for the enemy army (Rahab).

Even Jesus was born to an unusual family: Joseph was a widower, so Jesus had older stepbrothers to pick on him. And everyone thought Jesus was conceived by unmarried parents, and called him illegitimate even in his adulthood. While some family situations may be ideal, there is no shame in difference.

6. They share chores and power

As children develop, they need more autonomy and power if they are to develop responsibility and accountability.

7. They make time to be together

They actually like each other! Their greatest priority is spending time together. They play together and help each other work.

A young Australian executive remembers meeting a Jewish entrepreneur who ran a huge tourism empire across the US from his palatial Manhattan office. Their meeting had run all day Friday and they were close to finalising a \$50 million-plus deal. The boardroom was full of lawyers, accountants and other suited experts, all concentrating hard when the doors burst open and a little old lady marched in shouting, "Isaac! What, you're blind? You didn't see the sun about to go down?"

The forty-something entrepreneur rolled his eyes and said, "Hello, mother. Oh, is that the time? Sorry, ladies and gentlemen, we'll have to pick this up on Monday." And he got up and walked out to spend Shabbat with his extended family. The highly paid experts looked at each other, shrugged and came back on Monday.

One reason Jewish culture has lasted for thousands of years (despite some horrible blows) is its emphasis on family. Children are taught to honour their father and mother. Parents value their children above their own lives, and pass on their values and beliefs with as much skill and enthusiasm as they can.

The day of worship demands (not suggests) that they stop work for 24 hours each week and unwind with their family. Sounds brilliant for stressed workaholics who spend an average of 32 seconds per day with their children. (And it sends you back to work fresher anyway.)

8. Everyone is needed and vital to the team

Jim, a very talented executive, arrived on the boat from Greece when he was one year old and watched his parents start with nothing. He was helping them in their fish and chip shop before he started school. He said, "Some people would see this as terrible child labour or something, but it taught me customer relations, marketing, management, finance, you name it. And Dad worked with minimum stress – he'd be singing at 7am when he started heating up the oil, and whistling when he swept the floor at 9pm. He always had something to teach me – he listened to intelligent radio, and if he had a minute's break he'd be reading the paper - before he sold it." When other children were goofing around and doing drugs, Jim was needed. They didn't over do it – they gave him time to study, and to have fun and relax - but he was needed and valuable.

Parents who work outside the home can't always do this, but chores can be one way to make your child feel needed and boost their skills. Some parents buy pets mainly so that their child would be needed and responsible.

9. They share spiritual values and beliefs

Many new parents get interested in faith, hope and love. When you hold a newborn baby, it seems ridiculous to suggest that there is no meaning in life, no right or wrong, no big parent up there planning for us and wishing us well. And as children start thinking for themselves, they ask huge cosmic questions: "Daddy, is grandpa in heaven now?" "Where do people come from?" "When the sky flashes, is God taking my picture?" Even parents who found formal religion irrelevant, restrictive or hypocritical now start wondering.

Real spirituality affects your attitudes. Your attitude to yourself: genetic junk or a child of God? Your attitude to others: competitors or God's other children? Imperfect just like you, and deserving of understanding?

New parents tend to check out a local church or two, just for curiosity. And there are other ways to teach spirituality to your children:

- time in nature – seeing how huge and well-designed the universe is, and feeling how small you are.
- sponsoring a child in a poor country – a great way to teach your own children how lucky they are and how good giving feels. (Phone [ADRA](#) (Australia): 61 2 9489 5488; or [World Vision](#) (Australia): 133 240.)
- prayer at bedtime every night - anyone can simply talk to God about their worries, a safe and happy sleep, thank Him for the good things, their friends and family, etc. Children will need some guidance at first about what to say, but then they'll get on a roll and want to chat on about everything. You'll hear some classics. Try not to burst out laughing. (Prayer is a fantastic stress relief for parents too.)

10. They connect outside themselves

We live near an extended Mediterranean family. It's a large house owned by a sweet old couple in their 70s. Also living there are one son, his wife, and their children. There's also another son and his new wife. And their other 6 children drop in regularly with some of their 63 grandchildren. Wow! I'm not suggesting that lifestyle would work for everyone, but they are never lonely. If someone has a shaky time, they derive practical and emotional support from the rest. The old couple will not go to an aged care institution unless they need special medical care. The young Mums can continue working because they have free childcare from someone they trust. They all save huge money on rental and eventually build big houses themselves. If you need plumbing, concreting, accounting, legal advice, free pizza, panel-beating, medical care etc you can call a relative - and pay them nothing as long as you are willing to help them with your skill. Everybody wins. It's a joy to watch. I'm not suggesting you must copy that, but they have things Western culture has lost. Their children are mostly secure, responsible, high achieving children. They belong. They are needed. The adults have adult company rather than being stuck home alone with children all the time.

We need to be connected to a tribe. One child with a single Mum said as an adult how much he appreciated men from his church who took him camping, helped his mother renovate the house, and generally kept a fatherly eye on the family, and also their wives who didn't feel threatened and stayed close to his mother.

In cities, many people **live far from their family network** and form their own "tribe" from work, sport, club or religious community contacts. They mind each other's children for a sanity break. They swap their skills and pass on their contacts. Belonging to a social club or church or some kind of network is very handy. It offers:

- mentoring by specialists
- a feeling of connectedness
- practice in relating to a wide range of people
- knowing who else is influencing your child
- someone to keep an eye on children in those years when they think their parents know nothing
- a chance to give back and be appreciated, thus raising your self-esteem

11. They value grandparents

Grandparents who are healthy and live nearby can be an amazing help to parents and children, and can enjoy it thoroughly.

- They usually have more time to spend than parents do (and more than they did as parents).
- They can pass on the best family traditions (and a few funny stories) and give children a sense of “roots” and belonging.
- They usually have more time to spend than parents do (and more than they did as parents).
- They can pass on the best family traditions (and a few funny stories) and give children a sense of “roots” and belonging.
- They can babysit and help with chores, giving new parents a break.
- They can listen, and they’ve learned that listening is often much more effective than talking.
- They can keep their houses child-friendly (no poisons or breakables down low), and a supply of stories and toys.

What do grandparents get out of it?

- Being kept young and in touch with the fast-changing world
- Pride in seeing their offspring grow and do well.
- Love and belonging.
- Lots of hugs and physical affection
- Fun and a lot of laughs
- Interest and wonder again. Overcoming the blasé blahs by looking afresh at the world through little eyes. (“Do fish kiss, Nanna?” “How do your flowers get there, Pop?”)
- The feeling of being useful
- The joy of giving and teaching
- Passing on your values and what’s important
- Even when they are sick, they know that little angels will visit them and love them.

12. They don’t demand perfection

- but they keep aiming for nothing less.

13. They have good men.

That might sound sexist, but everyone already knows how vital mothers are to families. Not everyone knows how needed good men are – often not even good men themselves. Some men were not well fathered themselves, or maybe they interpret “gender equality” to mean women can do everything they can do, so they’re not needed. So here are a few words in praise of good father figures:

1. Boys need fathers to give them masculinity lessons. This doesn’t mean killing deer, fighting indigenes or hugging trees – just sensible male living like ...
 1. how to understand yourself and look after your body
 2. how to relate to other men
 3. how to treat and understand women and girls (guess what: they’re different and that’s very good!)
 4. how to enjoy work
 5. how to stand up for your beliefs and rights, and for other people's
2. If boys lack father figures, they’ll be attracted to the (bad) parenting they receive from gangs, ultra-violent media heroes etc.
3. Girls need fathers to be their first friend from the opposite sex.
4. Boys need rough and tumble play. Their rumbling Dad models self-control and how to calm down. His greater power is comforting because it makes you feel protected, and it also makes you more likely to obey him.
5. Boys are damaged by man-hating attitudes of the “All Men Are Bastards” type. If all men are, then they can act like that – it’s unavoidable.
6. Fathering provides more emotional rewards for men than work does.
7. When researchers ask children what they want from fathers, they rarely say “A bigger house.” The overwhelming majority say, “More time to play with us”, and, “Not being tired or grumpy when we’re together.”

Some Dad’s don’t live with their children, usually not by choice, due to divorce etc. Yet they’re still needed.

Here are some tips for Dads in that situation:

8. Don’t divorce your children, or get slack about seeing them. You are still their Dad. Make them feel secure, that your love will never change.
9. Don’t let them see any conflict or sadness between you and their mother. It really hurts to see two people they love hurting each other. If you can’t say anything positive about their mother, keep quiet. Even if you know your ex is criticising you, you will win points long-term by never criticising them.
10. Don’t force them to take sides. Little hearts will silently tear.
11. Don’t turn them into messengers: “What is your mother’s new boyfriend like?”

12. Keep in touch, especially for birthdays or speech nights. But don't just turn up for the "glory moments" when it's easy – phone them the night before exams, turn up when they're sick or their bike has a flat, and other times they need support.
13. Don't use them like a counsellor or adult friend, or express your sadness or anger around them. They have enough burdens of their own and may need you to listen.
14. Don't hide that you are struggling with emotions (because they'll know anyway), but show them you are winning. This will give them hope.
15. Let them share your life.
16. Be reliable! If you say you'll be there, be there – on time.

Advice

Many men are thrust into the position of being a step-dad. What advice is there for them?

- Take it slowly.
- Be friendly but play hard to get – they'll appreciate you more. Give them space.
- Don't punish them at first, even if their mother asks. Come up with a list of rules by asking them for input.
- Let them have some time alone with their Mum. They may still be struggling with having you taking her attention.
- Be secure in yourself. Know who you are, whether or not they like you, rather than being dependent on their approval.
- Do positive father things. Have fun with them. Help them. Listen to them.
- Encourage them to see their father if they want. He's not your competition.

And here's a thank-you to all the fill-in fathers out there. The male teachers who can spot a father-hungry boy and gladly give him some unofficial fathering and male bonding. The scout and youth group leaders who are good enough bush psychologists to give a young boy the emotional lift he needs, and the compliment of extra time and attention. The sporting coaches who may never be on TV, but try to be a good influence in the life of each child, particularly the virtually fatherless ones, and give them positive male attention and modelling. The grandfathers and uncles who try to help children through the hard yards of family breakdown even when they thought they quit fathering children 20 years ago.

And above all the Dads who are determined to do their level best and enjoy parenting. Your children may not yet be able to express what you're doing for them, but they will.

Questions

- What good families do you know? What can you learn from them?
- Watch a TV family (for example, *The Simpsons*) and compile lists of their strengths and weaknesses. You might like to do this as an activity with the children.

Sources & Recommended Reading:

- Parenting: *The Most Important Job in the World*, www.community.nsw.gov.au
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