

Emotional Intimacy

The idea of love has captured the imagination of humanity and has intrigued the hearts and minds of men and women since the beginning of time.

Years ago I came across a couple who were moving towards divorce following 32 years of marriage. Both in their 50's, the wife appeared sad and tired of living in what she believed was a loveless marriage.

David was shocked that Diana could make the claim he had never loved her. His life dream had been to go to university and become a criminal lawyer. He envisioned a home in the suburbs, vacationing in the Bahamas, and spending weekends with his wife and maybe 2 children. Yet, when he met Diana all of those dreams changed in a heartbeat.

Diana was a farmer's daughter who was raised in Saskatchewan. Her dream had been to own a farm. She envisioned getting married, reliving the joy of waking to the roosters crow at 5 a.m. and carrying on with her day, breathing in the soil, and fresh air. She could picture their many children who would help with the chores and the land. It would not be a glamorous life, but it would be the closest thing to feeling alive that Diana could imagine.



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thinking, they had a wonderful marriage as had he not worked hard all his life to give Diana what she had dreamed? Diana had expected David to read her mind and intuitively know that she was craving emotional intimacy. David in turn, assumed that Diana would perceive being loved by his work ethic. Unspoken assumptions created a growing resentment as this very kind couple struggled with their sadness and growing sense of alienation from each other.

It is emotional intimacy that drives the human spirit. That longing to share and be known for all that we are. It takes tremendous courage, coupled with a feeling of vulnerability to let down our guard to be seen for who we are.

Imagine how freeing it would be let others witness our strengths, weaknesses, joys, disappointments, dreams, despair, fears and hopes, all laid out for those we profess to love. However, this self revelation is not without its drawbacks. In that sharing we take the chance of being judged. This is a fear so powerful in many people that they spend their life desperately seeking emotional intimacy yet running as fast as they can when the opportunity to reveal oneself comes along.

Not surprisingly many people have never contemplated who they are. There is a limited self awareness of fears, hopes, strengths etc. They often describe themselves as merely "existing", without a foundation beneath them. They feel they are wandering aimlessly through life, questioning their purpose for being here.

The beauty in developing self awareness and emotional intimacy is that we become attuned to the richness and varying degrees of depth within ourselves and others as well. We can share it and in return give others permission to feel safe in sharing and discovering who they are as well.

"For relationships to flourish, there must be intimacy. It takes an enormous amount of courage to say to your loved one, "This is me, at times I may not be proud of it—in fact, I'm a little embarrassed by it—but this is who I am". (Bill Hybels)

"Seek first to understand before being understood. Use empathic listening to be genuinely influenced by a person, which compels them to reciprocate the listening. This creates an atmosphere of caring, respect and positive problem solving." (Stephen Covey)

Thankfully, David and Diana were able to share their needs and express their appreciation of one another. In so doing they rediscovered who they were as individuals and as a couple.

We all have a story and it is through the narrative of our life that others come to know us in a very special and unique way. The narrative of our life can also open up a wonderful world of possibilities in where we want to be personally and as a couple.

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It is emotional intimacy that drives the human spirit.

In 32 years David had never shared those dreams he once held for himself. He thought it was so glaringly obvious that he loved her. He had moved to the Prairies, become a farmer, worked usually 7 days a week, raised 7 children, and had never taken a vacation further than Toronto to visit his family. Diana was dumbfounded to hear that he had relinquished his dreams to be with her. David said he had simply developed new dreams with his wife.

In Diana's view their relationship had become nothing more than a co-existence of two very nice people who had little to say to each other. To David's way of

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Depressed? or Just Not Happy?

In searching for a topic to write on, I reached out to my social media network for suggestions. The overwhelming response was from people wanting to read about depression. My initial thoughts were, 'Depression?? Well that's depressing'. Focusing on the negative often leads to a negative mindset and negative mood, which is the last thing I want readers to be left with! I pondered, how can I write about depression with a positive spin? I began to question, perhaps people are requesting information on depression because they want to be happier, not because they are depressed? Sounds similar, but there is a difference.

A person who is clinically depressed, would meet the diagnostic

criteria for one of the 8 types of depression. Some symptoms may include extreme fatigue, loss of motivation, consistent



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negative thinking, and hopelessness for the future. These symptoms often appear as episodes that can last days to weeks to months. In chronic cases, symptoms can be present for years. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, 8% of the adult population will experience depression at some point. The treatment of depression is quite effective and symptoms can be alleviated often very quickly with few relapses in the future. An interesting twist on this, sometimes when the symptoms are alleviated, one is left with a sense of numbness or void. This void is not depression, it's just unhappiness.

Self help books have become a huge trend in our society. Book stores have entire sections on how to better anything and everything in our lives and happiness seems to take up much of this section. Funny thing about happiness, it's a temporary state. Somehow our culture seems to think we need to be happy and peppy all of the time with smiles big enough to show the world all of our teeth.

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Move Out of Your Comfort Zone

We all tend to gravitate to what is comfortable and familiar....sitting at the same place at the dinner table every night, going through the motions of the same routine to get ready for the day each morning, or going to the same favourite places on the weekends or on holidays. We are creatures of habit and routine habits generally make us comfortable.

It might be time to do something new, to think outside of the box, to nurture new neural pathways in the brain. There has been a lot of attention in recent years directed to the idea of brain plasticity. Daniel Siegel, the author of *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*, travels the world letting people know about the newer, more optimistic ideas regarding the brain. He

is just one of many professionals currently teaching about the potential of the brain. In the not so distant past, there was a belief that somewhere around age 25, the neurons in the brain start to die off and it's all downhill from there. We now know that the brain is capable of forming new neural networks and pathways well into old age. It is never too late to learn a new set of skills or new ways of doing things.

Ideas to stimulate neural pathways:

1) Do something creative. In our society, creativity is often underrated. In Wikipedia, "Creativity" refers to the invention or origination of any new thing (a product, solution, artwork,

literary work, joke, etc.) that has value. Make something. Witness something that others have made such as going to an art museum. Learn something new such as how to do woodwork or metal work, how to make your own soap, how to cook a new ethnic dish, or how to put together a photo book online. Creative possibilities are endless.

2) Do something that scares you... but is not actually dangerous. Anxiety symptoms such as rapid heart rate, shallow breathing, the sense of butterflies in your stomach, clammy



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Registered Psychologist

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Forgiveness: Release the Burden of Old Grudges

Mary, happily married for 10 years, still harbors extreme bitterness towards an ex-boyfriend who cheated on her 20 years ago. Brett remains enraged with a supervisor that “didn't appreciate” all of “the hard work” he had done many years earlier. Sheila is frequently at her “boiling point,” in response to the childhood emotional neglect she received from her mother, and wishes her mother would suffer the same pain she experienced.

What's common with the above scenarios? These situations all suggest difficulties with forgiving another person. Forgiveness is traditionally described as “pardoning” someone and “letting go of resentments” towards that person. It does not imply having to deny, minimize, negate, or even having to forget what happened. It does not dictate whether one still needs to have that person in one's life or not and does not take away from accountability on the part of the other. Although one may (or may not) decide to outwardly express forgiveness towards the other, true forgiveness involves being able to release oneself from the difficult emotions that one still feels towards that person. It is an inner process that can take time and some hard work.

Without real forgiveness, one may form a “grudge,” which is like a wound that has become “hardened” by the anger, resentment, and bitterness forming it. An old grudge may last for years or indefinitely. Not only do ongoing resentments affect one's health (e.g., increases in stress hormones and blood pressure, immune system depletion), they also “spill out” into one's present life, negatively affecting one's feelings about oneself and the ability to form healthy relationships with others. For example, one may be left feeling like a powerless victim, overreacting to or completely mistrusting others and constantly expecting to be hurt by them. Without forgiveness, one is literally bound to the past and short changed from being able to “move on” and fully engage in present life.

So, what are the steps that lead to forgiveness?

1) Initially, it is important to examine the costs of not forgiving, along with the benefits of forgiveness. One may be unhealthily invested in holding onto anger/resentment, believing it to provide a sense of power and control. Typically, however, this is only a façade that results in hurting oneself more than the other person. It is important to imagine the experience of feeling “liberated” from the weight of the anger and resentment, knowing that this will lead to improved self-esteem and relationships with others.



Deborah Kors, Ph.D.
Registered Psychologist

2) In order to further “let go” of the resentment, it will be important to look at some of the other unresolved feelings that still remain. The initial anger may have been valid at the time of the incident(s), because anger is a typical reaction to having been treated unfairly or having healthy expectations (i.e., trust in others, belief that others have “our back”) violated in some way. However, there may be underlying disappointment and hurt that were too vulnerable to experience at the time of the event(s). These feelings are important (but painful) to acknowledge and may “drive” some of the overlying anger and resentment. To facilitate accessing and expressing these difficult feelings, one can write a letter (that is not sent) to the other person, describing the emotional impact of the previous hurtful event.

3) A third step is to try to understand where the other person may have been coming from at the time they acted in the hurtful way. This does not mean “making excuses” but rather empathizing to understand possible reasons for their behaviors. Frequently, hurtful actions are indicative of the psychological limitations of the other person at that time. A parent, spouse, or friend may have been re-enacting their own “wounds” and were only able to do the best that they could, given their limited physical or emotional resources at the time. Reminding oneself of one's own limitations and the likely hurts that one has also (unintentionally) caused others can better facilitate an ability to empathize with another.

4) Finally, one can recognize the learning (albeit painful!) that has arisen from the hurtful experience and from the process of forgiveness. For example, there may be “gifts” of greater compassion towards others, tremendous inner strength, or overall emotional growth from the experience. There is an expression that says “what doesn't kill you makes you stronger” and forgiveness can definitely make one stronger.

Note: If the work towards forgiveness feels too large to do on one's own, it is important to seek help from a qualified therapist.

Workshop

Marriage Can Be Great!

by Denis Boyd, R.Psych.

Topics include:
Attitude, Peace with the Past,
Listening, Dating & Sense of
Humour, Forgiveness and more...

Location: St. Mary's Parish,
Vancouver

Date: October 24, 2012

Time: 7:00 - 10:00pm

Cost: \$20.00/person

Pre-registration by Oct. 19th is
required by calling 604-931-7211.

Books

Marriage Can Be Great! ... no, really

by Denis Boyd

Parenting Teens Without Power & Strings

by Rick Hancock

Depressed? or Just Not Happy? (continued from front cover)

Sometimes we look around at all of these big teething grins and realize we are not smiling. Then the thinking starts. 'Am I happy with my life?', 'Am I depressed?', 'Where is my big teething grin?'. Martin Seligman, founder of Positive Psychology, talks about this in his book *Flourish*. Seligman proposes that we, as a society, might need to turn our focus away from happiness and start focusing on well being. Once again, sounds similar but there is a difference.

Happiness is a temporary state of emotion and is often measured by cheery mood. Believe it or not, it's ok to be in a funky mood, blue mood, lazy mood, or any other mood you have. Our emotional systems were built to feel a variety of feelings. Striving to stay in one mood all of the time is unrealistic and unhealthy. Well-being on the other hand is measured by 5 constructs: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. Positive emotion includes happiness and life satisfaction. Engagement refers to being lost in a moment and completely absorbed by a task. Meaning refers to belonging to and serving something that you believe is

bigger than the self. Positive relationships are key in feeling connected to others. Lastly, accomplishment occurs when a person pursues something for the sake of pursuing and completing it.

There are many simple things a person can do to help increase his or her well being. One such exercise is called 'What Went Well'. Each night for a week, write down 3 things that went well that day and why they went well. These things may be small things, such as 'my spouse left me the last of the ice cream', or more important things. Next to each event, write why it happened. For example, you may write 'because he is a very thoughtful fella'. Doing this exercise will help your brain start focusing on the positive aspects of your life and stop dwelling on the negative aspects. Give it a whirl! Chances are it will leave you with lingering feelings of the warm fuzzies. So how does this relate back to depression?

Sometimes in the therapeutic relationship, the counsellor can help the client learn skills and strategies to lessen or eliminate symptoms of depression. Just because depressive symptoms are

lifted (you have more energy, are more motivated, sleeping and eating well, negative thinking patterns are gone) it doesn't guarantee 'happiness'. I would

Positive emotion includes happiness and life satisfaction.

even go as far to say more clients seek counselling because they would like to be happier than because they are depressed. To have a full and engaging life a person needs to look at many aspects of how they are living in the world. So instead of treating depression, what would happen if we focused on increasing people's well being? I would imagine a much more pleasant world



Move Out of Your Comfort Zone (continued from front cover)

hands, etc. tend to restrict us from doing things. It can be a vicious cycle because avoiding things that cause anxiety generally makes the anxiety worse. For example, if you are afraid of speaking in public and you successfully avoid every opportunity to speak in public, you will stay stuck with your anxiety symptoms related to public speaking. Doing something that scares you in this example might include joining an organization such as “Toastmasters” where you are presented with opportunities to push yourself out of your comfort zone and to build public speaking skills.

3) **Write down dreams and wishes for the future. Brainstorm.** Give yourself some time to sit down and reflect on what you are hoping to achieve in your life and what kinds of dreams you have for the future. The technique of “brainstorming” involves writing down all ideas without initially judging or critiquing. Judging

ideas as they emerge stifles the creative process. It's important to have uninterrupted time and space for this process. Some ideas to help stimulate this process is to think about what you would do if you won a million dollars, what you would do if you knew you could not fail, or how would you know that your life was a success if you were to look back on it at age 95 or 100.

It is never too late to learn a new set of skills or new ways of doing things.

4) **Switch things up.** Here is a fun activity. Sit at a different place at the dinner table tonight without saying anything to anyone and watch what happens. Sit at a different spot in your meeting room at work without saying

anything. Make contact with a friend you have lost touch with. Try a new kind of exercise. Change your routine and become less predictable to those around you.

5) **Challenge yourself and record your progress.** Gretchen Ruben wrote a book called *The Happiness Project*. She decided to see if she could get more happiness out of her current life, while not making any huge changes but instead focusing on certain areas of her life to see if she could milk more happiness from what she already had. She did this for a year. She reported feeling happier, and as a bonus, her book became a best seller

In summary, stimulating neural pathways is good for us. It keeps us engaged with life. It makes life more interesting as well as making us more interesting to be around. It helps us to grow and develop.