

Susan was asked to go to her parents' home for dinner. After trying on four outfits, she fell into a heap on the bed crying. Mark, her husband, had seen this behavior before. Wrapping his arms around her he gently said "I know your parents are going to make a comment about your appearance or weight, no matter what you wear. We don't have to go, Susan; why do you keep torturing yourself?" Why indeed?

As a grown woman she describes interactions with her parents as involving:

- Dreading encounters
- Guilt in wanting to avoid them
- Frustration, anger and shame when she speaks with them
- Feeling like a child in their presence
- Wishing they would disappear
- Hoping, despite the evidence to the contrary, that they will change.

Following a one hour call of listening to their recent vacation experience they said "Enough about us. Let's talk about you. You haven't mentioned whether you got the pictures WE sent you of OUR trip". It always comes back to them.

Susan is the adult child of parents who could be described as having destructive narcissistic personality. Some of the destructive patterns her parents displayed were:

- A demand for unlimited attention and compliments. Attention seeking behavior: bragging, tantrums, being loud, sulking, complaining, one-upmanship, cruel teasing.
- A demand to be seen as special and unique: what they say is more important than anyone else, impressing others with material objects or tales of their successes, expecting immediate compliance with their demands, anger if not the centre of attention.
- Insisting you're oversensitive, they will insist you should or should not feel a particular feeling, they will diminish your feelings, show no interest in listening to you, change the topic if you discuss something emotionally intense, criticize, devalue your comments when you express emotions, and tell you how

you "brought it on yourself" if you express a negative feeling.

- Believing you are an extension of them: they have the right to control what you say and do and show anger if you do not drop what you are doing and attend to their needs, become highly offended if your opinions or values differ from theirs, insinuate that you are stupid or inept when you don't rely on them to tell you what to do and how to do it.

- Grandiosity: boasting, arrogance, intensely wounded when you disagree, easily offended at any hint they are wrong or mistaken, unable to laugh at themselves.
- Lies, exaggerations, distortions, misleading statements, expectation of favors, manipulation and emotional blackmail.
- Emotional Abuse - perhaps the most bruising. They are

highly attuned to your sore spots, emotional triggers and how to induce shame and guilt. Examples are demeaning comments on your appearance or abilities, blaming you for their discomfort, criticizing, devaluing you and your accomplishments, belittling your efforts to please them, unfairly comparing you to others, insinuating that what you do or say is never quite right. You are kept on the defensive, always waiting for the next verbal attack. Remember, you are inferior!

Susan could have become like her parents but like many adults who have been raised by self absorbed parents, she took on the anti-model role. She lacked healthy narcissism such as self-confidence and self-respect. Self loathing and depression was a constant.

For the adult children of destructive narcissistic parents, it is time to stop being abused and interacting as though you are still a helpless child. Knowing where you come from can help you understand your unhealthy responses but it is not an excuse to keep living in pain and accepting abusive behavior. It is possible to protect yourself and set healthy boundaries without becoming vindictive or abusive yourself. You are not an extension of your parents and have the right to your own feelings and thoughts. Your heightened sensitivity and empathy can assist you in seeing that

your parents are likely not aware of the anguish they cause. Education can help you understand that your parents are unlikely to accept they are flawed as this will result in accepting they are imperfect, a fear so great that it threatens to destroy how they define themselves. Perhaps the most difficult shift is accepting the reality that they may never willingly change.

The exciting news is that you can change and in doing so, the dynamics of your relationship with your parents will also change. It may not be in the way you wanted at first, but imagine how it will feel to find your self respect, confidence, integrity and dignity unshaken in the face of interactions that had previously been devastating. It is possible to be gracious, kind and have healthy boundaries. Therapy can help you achieve these goals.



Maureen Chapman, M.A.
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Sabotaging Your Marriage 101

Sandra and Ben had anticipated getting married after their university graduation. They were looking forward to setting up their own home, being able to spend unprecedented time together, establish their own lifestyle, raise a family and continue to work in their chosen careers, supported unconditionally by the other. However, the reality that followed did not meet their expectations. Over time they became disillusioned, growing increasingly resentful of each other. They doubted their decision to marry. They blamed each other for their own unhappiness. What they didn't realize was that each of them had engaged in relational sabotage. They had allowed destructive patterns to creep in and jeopardize their relationship.



Joan Schultz, Ph.D.
Registered Psychologist

Messing up a marriage doesn't usually happen overnight. You have to work at it. If I were to teach a class on "How to Sabotage your Marriage" based on twenty-five years of observations, it would include the following:

- 1. Take your spouse for granted.** Discontinue politeness and appreciation. Don't acknowledge the other when they come home from work or outside engagements, don't express appreciation for domestic chores performed, or income being brought home to meet family expenses. Don't let your spouse know they are important to you.
 - Here the "sins of omission" are just as great as are those of "commission". It is the absence of appreciation, courtesy and acknowledgment that dismantle the relationship.
- 2. Be satisfied with the mediocre.** Don't expect much from your relation-

ship. Resist regular "talk times" or "dates" where just the two of you connect. Express disinterest when your spouse suggests doing anything different or fun and most importantly, don't initiate any activities or time together which might get his or her hopes up!

- Although not overtly destructive, the apathy reflected here can be likened to the gradual wearing of carpeted steps... over time, it is the everyday grievances which gradually wear the relationship out.

3. Be negative. Communicate your cynicism, discontent and unhappiness with your spouse as much as possible. Be irritable and grumpy most days, and don't attempt to moderate your mood in any way. Be pessimistic about the future, and oversensitive about slights from others. Assume the worst of everyone.

- In Gottman's* study of marriages he observed that "there is a healthy balance between positive and negative feelings and actions toward each other...that magic ratio is 5 to 1. As long as there is five times as much positive feeling and interaction between husband and wife as there is negative, the marriage is likely to be stable over time".
- 4. Misplace your priorities.** Ensure the career or children or your parents or (fill your own priority in) come first. Put any extra effort or resources that might be available for you into your own interests or hobbies or volunteer work. Believe that although you are too busy with these priorities right now, your spouse will understand and you can make up for it later.
- Fatigue and time pressure are two of

the most common factors that rob couples of time available to increase their emotional and physical intimacy with one another. Your spouse will certainly get a clear message that they are not important if optional resources whether in the form of time or money are spent elsewhere. A painful lesson learned is that if you don't make your relationship with your spouse a priority, someone else will.

5. Speak demeaningly. Convey disrespect when you talk to your spouse by using insults, name-calling, sarcasm and mockery. Frequently speak sharply and angrily. Use nonverbal methods to communicate contempt such as rolling your eyes, turning away, and sneering. Criticize your spouse in front of others (especially your children).

- Steven Covey** discusses the impact of an emotional trust account where positive "deposits" such as affirmations, active listening, kindnesses and praise contribute to building up the other, and

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Also in this issue:

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Destructive Narcissistic ParentsPage 4

Marriage Can Be Great! ...no, really

The ideas shared in my book, *Marriage Can Be Great! ...no, really* originate from encounters with hundreds of couples over the past 34 years. I share with you now three excerpts which illustrate the need to acknowledge and deal with the underlying emotions that are always present in our marital, family and work relationships.

Story One - Flat Marriage Syndrome

Ken has decided to seek out a counsellor to discuss his marriage to Kim. He tells the therapist that he loves Kim, but that he doesn't feel "in love" with her, and that he's considering leaving their relationship.

When asked what things bother him about his wife or the marriage, Ken replies that because he is easy going, very little bothers him about Kim.

When asked if he is able to tell Kim that he's frustrated at times, he says he doesn't like to hurt her feelings, and therefore keeps his complaints to himself. "Besides," he says, "They're not a big deal."

WHAT is happening here?

Ken believes it's important to feel in love with his spouse, and because his feelings are flat, he wonders about staying together. Ken grew up in a home where his mother was depressed and frequently upset about even the smallest of concerns. He became very sensitive about upsetting her and would keep his worries to himself in an attempt to protect his mother.

TEAMTOOLS

When feelings go flat, some couples consider ending their relationship instead of figuring out what's wrong and making the necessary repairs. Such reactions may lead these couples to give up too easily when troubles arise.

Ken is very easy-going and may

unintentionally be hurting his relationship. He is sensitive to upsetting other people, and therefore holds back his frustrations from Kim. There is a connection between his withheld emotion and his "flat" love feelings. If Ken is going to feel in love with his wife, he has to be open with her about his concerns.

Ken and Kim have been trying *T-Times* [daily Talk-Times, ch.4] and in the process, have opened up dialogue about various issues. Kim has always been candid, but is now also giving some attention to the impact of her words upon Ken.

For his part, Ken is now more open about what annoys him, and Kim is receptive to the feedback. Ken is feeling that his marriage is being rejuvenated. He now says that he feels "in love" with the woman he loves.



Denis Boyd, M.A.
Registered Psychologist

Tip: Share your full range of emotions.

Story Two - Tone Well Heard

It's getting close to dinner time and Harvey calls his daughter, Carrie. He shouts so that she will hear him since she's in her room with the door closed. Hanna, who is standing nearby, tells Harvey not to talk to their daughter "so sternly". Harvey denies that he has, saying that he has simply called Carrie for dinner. He becomes annoyed with Hanna for challenging him, yet again, on his parenting.

WHAT is happening here?

Harvey is surprised that Hanna thinks he's speaking "sternly" to their daughter, as this isn't his intention. He becomes annoyed with Hanna for accusing him of something he doesn't believe he's done. He doesn't think to ask Hanna if she's uncomfortable with the way he called Carrie.

TEAMTOOLS

It is helpful to acknowledge an emotion instead of reacting to an angry tone of voice. This can be a challenge but is helpful for mutual understanding. When Hanna hears something in Harvey's tone, she can ask him if he's annoyed with Carrie, rather than criticizing him for his tone of voice. This approach allows Harvey to self-examine without feeling attacked.

Here's another way the above story could have unfolded:

Harvey calls his daughter, Carrie for dinner. Hanna, who is standing nearby, asks him if he's annoyed with their daughter. He says that he isn't and asks Hanna if it sounds like he is. She says that for her, it sounded like he was annoyed. He thinks for a moment and acknowledges that he's tired and perhaps he sounds stern when he's tired.

Carrie sticks her head out of her door and asks what her father wants. He tells her that it's time for dinner. Carrie asks him if he's annoyed with her. He laughs and says that he isn't. He says he's tired and that must be why he sounded upset. He then asks Carrie, jokingly, if her mother phoned her in her room. He finds the similarity of their responses to him pleasantly unsettling.

Harvey will monitor his tone more carefully in the future.

Tip: Checking out a tone of voice is better than reacting to it.

Books

**Marriage Can Be Great!
...no, really**
by Denis Boyd, R.Psych.

**Parenting Teens Without Power
and Strings**
by Rick Hancock, R.Psych.

Story Three - He's So Defensive

Tom and Tina are driving to a weekend getaway. In general, Tina has been opening up more with Tom and telling him what bothers her. She notices after a short time that he seems agitated and defensive. She finds this frustrating, and stops talking to him about her concerns. They sit together in silence for the rest of the drive.

WHAT is happening here?

It is good that Tina is trying to be more open with Tom, as she's been hesitant to do this in the past. She raises a couple of concerns, but unfortunately, doesn't first ask him about his day or his current mood.

Rather than accept her concerns, Tom withdraws, feeling attacked. Not feeling understood, Tina shuts down. Neither acknowledges the other's feeling.

TEAMTOOLS

When talking with Tom, it's

Sabotaging your Marriage 101 (continued from front cover)

therefore contribute to a positive "bank account" and relationship. Criticizing one's spouse publicly is one of the biggest "withdrawals" possible. Avoid it at all costs.

...the absence of appreciation, courtesy and acknowledgment dismantles the relationship.

6. Allow secrets and 'little white lies'. Believe that little white lies don't hurt. Have a private life and relationship(s) apart from your spouse. Avoid being accountable for your time and money.

- Lies are seldom little and never white. The practice of deceit, or withholding, creates a pattern of secretiveness which begins the

process of trust erosion. Even though your spouse may not know exactly what is wrong, they know that something is wrong. Any type of deceit begins to erode trust, which is the very foundation of the relationship and family rest on. While less visible, all else in the relationship depends on it.

important for Tina to monitor his reaction and to ask about his feelings. Often, feelings may present themselves in a disconcerting way (e.g. defensiveness). For his part, Tom has the challenge of not getting caught up in his own feelings about what Tina has said. He can ask Tina if she's concerned or annoyed.

Tom and Tina are driving to a weekend getaway. In general, Tina has been opening up more with Tom. She begins their conversation by asking how he is. He seems tired to her, and she asks him if this is the case. It turns out that he is, but he's excited to be having a weekend away without the kids.

He asks her if she's fine, and she says she's a little frustrated with the job list from last week. Tom acknowledges her annoyance and says that he'll get back on task early in the week. Tina says she hopes she's not bothering him by bringing up her concerns.

TIP: Feelings are hiding behind defensiveness.

7. **Allow domestic chaos.** Be messy. Don't clean up after yourself. And especially don't clean up after others - that's not your mess, anyway! Expect your spouse to clean/cook/chauffeur whenever necessary, because you have more important things to do. Make it clear that there is "man's work" and "women's work", and ne'er the twain shall meet.

Ask your spouse to "do their share" around the home, instead of asking them "to help". Schedule a discussion to divide chores, delineate

Although Sandra and Ben, like many others, had allowed their marriage to get to a sad state of disrepair, their relationship can be reconciled. As with any other goal worthy of attainment, the state of a marriage reflects the effort put into it.

Workshops

Marriage Can Be Great! ...no, really

Topics include:
Attitude, Communication,
Listening, Dating, Sense of
Humour and more.

presented by
Denis Boyd,
Registered Psychologist

Monday, October 18, 2010
7:00 - 10:00pm
St. Joseph's Parish
Port Moody

Monday, November 8, 2010
7:00 - 10:00pm
St. Theresa's Parish
Burnaby

Pre-registration is required by
calling 604-931-7211

* Gottman and Silver, at <http://www.psychologytoday.com>
**Covey, Steven. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.*