

HEALING STRAINED RELATIONSHIPS

by June Steiner, PhD

DO YOU STILL LOVE EACH OTHER? OR EVEN KNOW?

DO YOU HAVE A DESIRE TO HEAL THE RELATIONSHIP?

ARE YOU STAYING FOR THE KIDS, ECONOMIC REASONS, FEAR OF CHANGE OR BECAUSE YOU BELIEVE THERE IS A POSSIBILITY AND DESIRE TO HEAL THE RELATIONSHIP?

DO YOU BELIEVE THERE WOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM IF THE OTHER WOULD CHANGE?

DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR PARTNER HAS FAILED YOU OR YOU THEM?

DID YOU MARRY WITH EXPECTATIONS THAT WERE BASED ON WHAT AND WHO YOU THOUGHT YOUR SPOUSE WAS WHEN YOU FIRST MET?

ARE THE VERY THINGS THAT ORIGINALLY ATTRACTED YOU TO YOUR SPOUSE, THE SAME THINGS THAT NOW CAUSE IRRITATION AND CONFLICT?

ARE YOU BRAVE ENOUGH, LOVING ENOUGH AND OPEN ENOUGH TO LOOK AT YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR AS WELL AS YOUR SPOUSES TO FIND OUT WHAT IS HAPPENING AND HOW TO SOLVE IT?

ARE YOU AFRAID YOU CAN'T HAVE WHAT YOU WANT IN THIS RELATIONSHIP?

ARE YOU AFRAID YOUR PARTNER DOESN'T THINK YOU ARE ENOUGH? DO YOU THINK YOU ARE ENOUGH?

DO YOUR FEELINGS SEEM UNSEEN OR UNHEARD?

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF REACTING RATHER THAN RESPONDING?

DO YOU USE ANGER OR VICTIM BEHAVIOR TO AVOID LOOKING AT THE TRUTH OF WHATS SO ABOUT YOU, YOUR SPOUSE AND THE RELATIONSHIP? WHAT IN YOU NEEDS TO BE STRONG ENOUGH TO SUPPORT THE NEEDED CHANGE AND HEAL THE RELATIONSHIP OR TO CHOOSE TO LEAVE BECAUSE IT IS APPROPRIATE?

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN DISCUSSING THE ISSUES IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

WHAT YOU DON'T SOLVE NOW WILL FOLLOW YOU WHEREVER YOU GO AND WITH ANYONE ELSE IF YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE, ACKNOWLEDGE AND CHANGE YOUR OWN BELIEFS, PATTERNS AND BEHAVIORS THAT ADD TO THE PROBLEMS.

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IT'S YOUR ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND TO NEGOTIATE SOLUTIONS AND AGREEMENTS THAT KEEPS THE RELATIONSHIP HEALTHY.

IT'S ABOUT BEING HONEST IF YOU WANT TO MAKE THE CHANGES NECESSARY TO HEAL AND GROW. IT'S ABOUT BEING HONEST WITH YOURSELF ABOUT WANTING TO CONTINUE THE RELATIONSHIP SO YOU DON'T SABOTAGE THE WORK.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON, ITS ABOUT HOW YOU DEAL WITH CONFLICT, FEAR AND ANGER THAT ARISES WHEN YOU DON'T LIKE "WHAT'S HAPPENING" AND DON'T KNOW HOW TO ADDRESS IT IN A WAY THAT FEELS SAFE OR COMFORTABLE, OF IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE YOU CAN HAVE THE FULFILLING RELATIONSHIP YOU DESIRE AND DESERVE. ITS ABOUT CREATING HEALTHY LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES.

IT'S ABOUT LEARNING HOW TO REACH AGREEMENTS FOR CHANGING THE SITUATION. IT'S ABOUT CREATING A SAFE CONTAINER (ENVIRONMENT) IN WHICH TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS. THE CONTAINER MUST HOLD RESPECT, BOUNDARIES, CLARITY, TRUTH-TELLING AND THE DESIRE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM WITHOUT WINNING OR LOSING. AND IT TAKES TWO PEOPLE WILLING TO WORK TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE IT.

IT TAKES WORKING WITH THE INTENTION TO SOLVE PROBLEMS INSTEAD OF BEING RIGHT OR NEEDING TO WIN, THERE ARE FEW SITUATIONS YOU CAN'T REPAIR. THE LONGER YOU CONTINUE AVOIDING THE REPAIR, THE DEEPER THE WOUNDS AND THE HARDER TO OPEN YOUR HEART AGAIN.

HOW DID YOU GET WHERE YOU ARE TODAY? WHAT PERSONAL DECISIONS GOT YOU HERE?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE TODAY?

ARE YOU ANGRY OR SCARED? WITHDRAWN OR OBSESSIVE? SAD AND LONELY? DISTRUSTFUL?

ARE YOU WILLING AND READY TO FIND A SOLUTION?

ARE YOU STILL OPEN TO LOVE GROWING BETWEEN YOU? ARE YOU READY TO STOP BLAMING AND START EXPLORING WHAT IS HAPPENING AND WHY?

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING, FEELING OR SAYING THAT WENT ON IN YOUR CHILDHOOD THAT WAS HURTFUL, DEMEANING AND PAINFUL. REMEMBER HOW YOU NEVER WANTED TO DO THAT OR BE LIKE THAT? ARE ANY OF THOSE BEHAVIORS PRESENT AND AFFECTING YOUR SITUATION NOW? ARE THEY PREVENTING YOU FROM CALMLY TALKING ABOUT AND FINDING SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS IN YOUR PRESENT RELATIONSHIP?

WHAT FIRST BEGAN TO HAPPEN THAT YOU DIDN'T LIKE?

WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT IT? STORE IT, IGNORE IT, DENY IT, ARGUE ABOUT IT, TALK ABOUT IT, ASK FOR HELP WITH IT?

WHAT HELPED?

WHAT MADE IT WORSE?

WHAT DIDN'T YOU DO ABOUT IT?

WHAT DID THAT CAUSE TO HAPPEN? (MORE STORED OR EXPRESSED ANGER, PAIN, BLAME, NAGGING, BARBS, DEPRESSION, FEAR OR SADDNESS. GOING NUMB OR COLD, OR WITHDRAWAL.)OR LIVING SEPARATE LIVES?

ARE YOU WILLING TO LEARN TO COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELINGS IN A WAY THAT CAN BE HEARD? IN A WAY THAT INVITES CURIOSITY AND ALLOWS ENOUGH FORGIVENESS TO FIND A SOLUTION? ARE YOU WILLING TO LEARN HOW TO LISTEN SO THAT YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR SPOUSE IS FEELING, RIGHT OR WRONG? IN A WAY THAT HELPS YOU TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN HIS/HER MIND?

UNTIL YOU LEARN HOW TO QUIET YOUR OWN MIND SO YOU CAN HEAR CLEARLY WHAT YOUR PARTNER IS FEELING OR ASSUMING, YOU CAN'T WORK ON A SOLUTION OR FIND AGREEMENTS TO CHANGE BEHAVIOR.

DO YOU NEED TO BE RIGHT?

DO YOU NEED TO DEFEND?

DO YOU NEED TO MAKE WRONG?

OR DO YOU WANT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM, WHICH CAN'T BE SOLVED FROM A PLACE OF NEEDING TO BE RIGHT AND YOUR PARTNER WRONG.

DO YOU WAIT TIL YOU ARE ANGRY OR SCARED TO TALK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS? WHY?

WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY OR SCARED, YOU ARE INCAPABLE OF OPENING AND HEARING SOMEONE ELSE'S FEELINGS, ESPECIALLY IF YOU BELIEVE THEY ARE THE PROBLEM.

ALL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ISSUES NEED TO BE DONE WHEN BOTH SPOUSES ARE AS CLOSE TO CALM AS POSSIBLE AND NOT CARRYING ALOT OF ANGER, VICTIM OR WITHDRAWAL ENERGY. IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS NEED TO BE CARRIED ON WITH RESPECT, APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE AND A WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN. IF YOU ARE BEYOND DOING THIS, YOU NEED TO FIND THE HELP THAT WILL GET YOU THERE.

ARE YOU AFRAID OF CONFLICT AND THINK IT'S WRONG OR DANGEROUS? DO YOU TRUST THAT YOU MATTER ENOUGH TO BE HEARD IF YOU SAY IT WITHOUT BLAME OR JUDGMENT? ONCE YOU USE BLAME AND JUDGMENT, INSTEAD OF CALMLY AND CLEARLY STATING YOUR FEELINGS, YOU BUILD A WALL AND WON'T BE

HEARD BECAUSE YOUR PARTNER WILL BE USING WHAT EVER IS NECESSARY TO DEFEND AND HIS/HER MIND WILL BE FILLED WITH DEFENDING, NOT LISTENING.

"HAVE YOU WALKED IN YOUR SPOUSE'S SHOES" IS AN IMPORTANT STATEMENT, NOT BECAUSE IF YOU HAVE, YOU'LL AGREE, BUT BECAUSE YOU WILL HAVE ALLOWED YOURSELF TO HEAR WITHOUT HAVING TO DO OR AGREE TO ANYTHING. YOU WILL SIMPLY KNOW WHAT YOUR SPOUSE FEELS, BELIEVES AND IS EXPERIENCING. FROM THIS PLACE YOU CAN EITHER FIND SPACE AND STRENGTH TO EXPLORE A SOLUTION OR YOU'LL KNOW THIS ISN'T SOMETHING THAT CAN BE HEALED BETWEEN YOU. IT ALWAYS TAKES TWO HONEST, TRUSTWORTHY PEOPLE TO EXPLORE A PROBLEM AND DECIDE IF IT CAN BE SOLVED.

TAKE SOME TIME TO GO INSIDE, ASK YOUR HEART IF IT CAN OPEN ENOUGH AROUND THIS ISSUE TO ALLOW CLARITY AND HEALTHY ACTION. LET IT BE AN EXPLORATION OF WHAT THE PROBLEM IS, HOW IT UNFOLDED AND WHAT YOU SEE IN THE WAY OF CHANGES THAT HAVE TO TAKE PLACE ON BOTH SIDES TO FIND A LASTING SOLUTION. THEN GIVE IT TIME FOR THE BEHAVIOR TO CHANGE, KNOWING MISTAKES WILL TAKE PLACE IN BEHAVIOR AND IN YOUR EMOTIONAL RESPONSES. ONCE YOU DECIDE ON A SOLUTION, TRUST THAT BOTH PARTIES INTEND TO CHANGE AND IT MAY TAKE LONGER THAN YOUR USUAL COMFORT LEVEL.

TAKE ALL THE TIME YOU NEED TO PREPARE TO USE CURIOSITY, PATIENCE AND KINDNESS AS YOU EXPLORE THE PROBLEM TOGETHER AND SHARE WHERE EACH OF YOU ARE EMOTIONALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY AROUND IT AS YOU GO ALONG.

CREATING THE CONTAINER:

TO PREPARE FOR THE TALKS, CREATE A SAFE PLACE TO TALK, ESTABLISH THE GUIDELINES AROUND INAPPROPRIATE WORDS, AGRESSIVE ENERGY, LOUD VOICES OR BLAME OR SHAME THAT YOU BOTH NEED FOR RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION AND EMOTIONAL DISCLOSURE. HAVE A SIGNAL TO USE FOR WHEN YOU FEEL YOU CAN NO LONGER STAY WITHIN THE GUIDELINES AND NEED A TIME OUT. ALWAYS SAY WHEN YOU WILL BE ABLE TO RESUME AND IT MUST NOT BE LONGER THAN 24 HOURS. THERE NEEDS TO ALSO BE A SIGNAL WHEN YOU FIND THAT THE OTHER PERSON IS NOT RESPECTING THE GUIDELINES AND HAS GOTTEN TO DISRESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR. THERE MUST BE AGREEMENT THAT IF EITHER SIGNAL IS USED, IT WILL BE RESPECTED. ALSO THERE MUST BE AGREEMENT THAT THE SIGNALS WON'T BE USED TO REMOVE ONESELF FROM BEING RESPONSIBLE TO SHOW UP.

IN A QUIET, LOW EMOTIONAL TIME, EACH OF YOU MAKE A LIST OF WHAT EACH OF YOU FEELS ARE THE MAJOR PROBLEMS, CREATING THE MATERIAL TO BE DISCUSSED.

NEXT TO THE LIST, WRITE WHO YOU BELIEVE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ISSUE.

NOTICE IF YOU INCLUDED YOURSELF IN THE MAKING OF THE PROBLEM OR IN THE SOLUTIONS.

NOTICE IF YOU ARE WILLING TO TAKE ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR NEW BEHAVIOR OR TO HEAL IT OR ACCEPT WHAT IS.

THEN WRITE WHAT YOU FEEL ARE TWO POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM TO GET THE EXPLORATION ON ITS WAY. BE OPEN TO HEARING WHAT THE OTHER SAYS: LISTENING DOESN'T MEAN AGREEMENT, IT MEANS CLARITY AND ASSURANCE YOU ARE BOTH DISCUSSING THE SAME ISSUE.

AT EACH MEETING, ONE OF YOU PICKS THE MOST IMPORTANT ITEM FROM YOUR LIST AND YOU SPEND THE ENTIRE SESSION ON THAT ISSUE ALONE. YOU DO NOT DO MORE THAN ONE ISSUE PER CONVERSATION.

ALWAYS RETURN TO THE ISSUE WITHIN A WEEK TO SEE HOW YOU BOTH ARE DOING WITH IT, TO SEE IF OTHER NEW FEELINGS HAVE COME UP THAT NEED TO BE EXPRESSED AND TO REAGREE ON THE ACTION YOU DECIDED WAS APPROPRIATE.

IF YOU AREN'T WILLING TO WORK ON THE ISSUE WITHOUT SPEAKING BLAME OR JUDGMENT, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RESOLVE IT AND OTHER DECISIONS WILL HAVE TO BE MADE.

CLARITY, HONESTY, DESIRE AND LOVE ARE POWERFUL AGENTS IN HEALING AND GROWING RELATIONSHIPS.

BE WELL, JUNE