

Learning What They Didn't Teach Us

By Cheri DeMoss

A relationship. We've all had one at some time in our life. Maybe it was a good one that didn't work out. Maybe it was hell from the start.

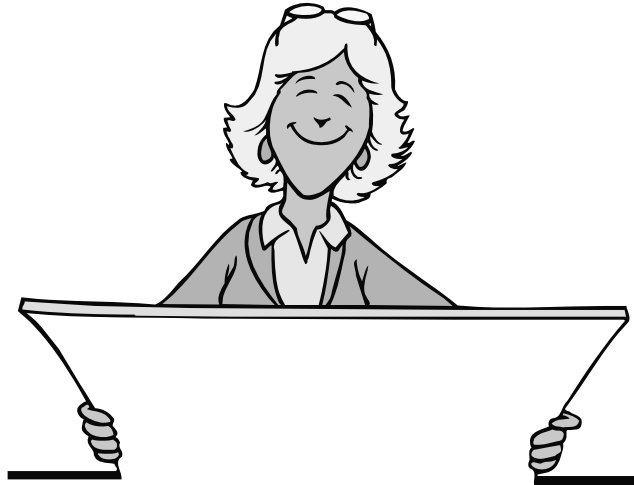
Most of us search for the ideal one. We look high & low with the belief that it's a matter of finding the RIGHT PERSON. The problem is two-fold. Most of us only have a vague indication of how to go about choosing a partner. Even if we are able to make a choice we have no idea how to make it work.

At the very best - we guess. We try different things in an attempt to get it right. Always hopeful...we try again & again.

What we need to realize is that most of us were never taught how to have a healthy relationship. Few of us have ever seen it role-modeled. We've been so shamed...so often told that who we are is wrong or bad that when we enter into a relationship we are, on a very basic level, terrified.

We've learned to hear what is being said to us as "we are bad." We immediately start to react to the other person by defending or explaining our position. They don't feel understood. They try again to tell us something that we're afraid is going to feel awful.

So often in intimate relationships it feels, on an unconscious level, that there



Even though we weren't taught how to have a healthy relationship, getting what we want in a relationships is only a matter of learning what they didn't teach us.

Want To End The Arguing But Not The Relationship? Classes For Couples

No one teaches us how to have a relationship. Even when we're trying our best - we are guessing. We end up in relationships where we settle for less intimacy, closeness, & more arguing than we want.

Reactions towards & fear of our partner creates more & more distance. Both people usually feel that if their partner changed a few things the arguing would stop.

When in reality they both

need to understand what's going on in the relationship & learn specific skills & behaviors that are relationship building instead of relationship destroying.

Our classes teach couples how to get understood; talk openly about reactions, patterns & fears; ask for what they want; listen without becoming afraid; and feel close again.

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is so much to be afraid of.

What if they disapprove of us. What if they say we're not getting "IT" right. What if we believe they know enough about their own feelings to trust what they say.

Then when we realize they don't have a clue as to what they really feel - we end up feeling foolish, lied to, & angry.

What is essential, the bread & butter, of a healthy relationship is for us to realize that the ability to choose the right partner...a partner with potential...depends on our ability to be conscious of our feelings & our family patterns.

Most of us have unconscious relationships. The kind where at the beginning, the relationship seems like everything we've ever wanted. A person who listens to us. Then the family patterns kick in & we find ourselves living with our worst nightmare.

Being unaware of our family patterns sets us up to choose the very behaviors that cause us the most pain. Whether it's choosing a partner who hits us, yells at us, scolds us, withdraws from us, or is too frightened to know their feelings. But let's say we choose a partner with potential. We have a relationships with a good base. We feel close. We feel intimate. As time goes on, the patterns kick in.

Then what? We know intimacy comes from sharing (continued on page 3)

Inside...

**Learning What They Didn't Teach Us
Communication Basics
Quick Checklist For Your Relationship
About Cheri DeMoss & Empowering Options**

**Pages 1 & 3
Page 2
Page 2
Page 3**

Communication Basics

By Cheri DeMoss

Without being aware of it - most of us do behaviors that stop us from communicating with others. Without direct, healthy communication it's not possible for us to connect with others - or allow them to connect with us.

The following are some communication basics.

We only judge someone or something when we are scared or threatened.

Using them will help re-establish safety & trust.

Judging your partner destroys trust & safety. Whether in your head or out loud we only judge something or someone when we're threatened. Sometimes we can be threatened just because the other person is different from us. We can become threatened on little differences - the way they fold the towels, the food they like to eat, etc. Or we can become threatened by big differences - money, sex, or addictive behaviors.

When our families were threatened by us they usually made us change to make them comfortable. We in turn, do the same thing to anyone that scares us. Remember - when we act out our judgments we support our fears not our strengths. By learning how to allow differences without **reacting or punishing our partner** we create safety & trust. Thus giving each other the acceptance & support we

need.

Be aware of what you are doing when you talk to your partner. In heated arguments we're usually unaware of how **much of our energy is focused on getting the other person to feel bad or wrong.** We were raised with this style of communication as our "bread & butter"...it was so much a part of our families communication style that we're unaware when we're doing the same thing.

Notice a repeated pattern on both sides of *trying to make the other person feel at least as bad or wrong as you feel.* Notice that when you've been successful the other person feels awful & you feel better! You feel relaxed, not bad - less wrong.

Initially it doesn't feel as satisfying to tell the other person what you feel about what they did because this healthier behavior minimizes how bad the other person

can be made to feel. Remember - we were taught that sharing our feelings equals annihilating the other person's self esteem.

It's uncomfortable to clearly say your feelings about what they did because it's so different from what our families role modeled for us. We were taught that the way to make someone care about how we feel is to make them feel as bad as we do.

By learning & using direct, clear communication skills we can let those most important to us know how we feel. When we express our feelings in non-abusive, non-attacking ways we provide emotional room for the other person to hear & understand us. By being our own role-model, we can learn to trust that others will be able to hear what we're feeling & let our feelings touch them.

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Fairness Is Essential

By Cheri DeMoss

There must be a sense of fairness within a healthy, loving relationship in order for it to survive the rough times.

Both partners need to *demonstrate a consistent* willingness to understand the other person's feelings, thoughts & reasons as well as they understand their own.

When the two of you begin to talk you want to be sure there is enough time for both sides.

If not schedule a different time to talk. Each person takes their turn expressing their feelings non-abusively, without being interrupted by their partner's facts, feelings, or opinions.

The goal is to reach a mutual understanding; a fair exchange.

(continued on p.3)

Quick Checklist For Your Relationship

This is an easy to understand checklist to help you evaluate your relationship. A healthy romantic relationship is very similar to a healthy friendship in that it raises your self esteem more often than not. It is primarily a positive experience.

Healthy Relationship

- Energy
- Hope, Optimism, Positivity
- An Enhanced Self
- Growth
- Healthy, Consistent, Intimacy

Toxic Relationship

- Fatigue, Tiredness
- Dread, Impending Doom, Negativity
- Guilt, Shame, & Blaming
- Stagnation or Decline
- Obsession & Compulsion

Learning What They Didn't Teach Us

(continued from page 1)
our feelings. But we have never been taught how to tell the difference between our feelings and our reactions. So we give it our best shot. What comes out of our mouths is usually reaction covered feelings, designed to prove our partner wrong. This behavior creates clouds of emotional confusion and anger. We need to be able to hear each other, but we don't know how.

Then we try to share our feelings, absolutely believing that if they only under-

Most of us were never taught how to have a healthy relationship.

stood what we felt we would be close again. But they don't hear us. All they hear is us attacking. Then they explain how our feelings are wrong, how we do not understand. Things start to escalate.

Now we have entered into a crazy-making time in the relationship. Things feel overwhelming. Nothing makes sense. We try to figure out how we got into this emotional twilight zone.

What's happening is both partners are feeling shamed and desperate to be understood by the person they love most in the world. That's why it's **so hard to listen** and be accurate about what is being said.

We have learned from our families that to listen to those we love means to listen to how we are "bad"; how we've gotten it "wrong" - **again**.

What needs to happen is for both partners to understand what they are each doing to the relationship and to become proficient at specific, learnable relationship skills.

The couple needs to recognize how their family patterns are "hooking" and causing them to react. Both partners need to learn how to be in charge of the shame and fear reactions they brought to the relationship. Being able to talk openly about these reactions, feelings, and patterns brings us closer to each other.

Most of us have a belief and a fear that to be aware of and share our feelings - *the good ones and the scary ones* - with a partner, will cause more problems and stress. We have experienced this from our families and past relationships. We've learned that openly telling the person we love what we think, feel, and fear will be met with reactive

criticism, misunderstanding, and detailed lists of how we are wrong and bad.

Couples who want to have a strong, close and healthy relationship need to understand that to be intimate with our partner means to know what we feel, hear what they feel, and know when we are having a reaction. We need to understand that to attack is to cause damage to our partner and our relationship. To know that even though we weren't taught how to have the relationship of our dreams. We can create it. It's a just a matter of learning that the fear, shame, and reactions are what others taught us was familiar and "normal".

Empowering Options works in teaching couples how to end the arguing without ending the relationship.

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Fairness Is Essential

(continued from p. 2)
Avoid making one person right at the other's expense.

One of the reasons so many of us feel lonely, hopeless, or depressed when we're in a relationship is because we don't know how to stay emotionally connected to our partners. We get caught up in the fear of being misunderstood. Most of us have only the adults in our childhood to role model our behaviors after. We've learned how to emotionally batter someone to give ourselves the feeling of not being "wrong or bad".

But we do this at the expense of being fair, loving, and understanding. By learning to focus on what the other person is feeling - knowing we will have our turn to share - we create the intimate, loving connection we had at the beginning of our relationship.

About Cheri DeMoss - Empowering Options

Cheri DeMoss is Founder and Director of **EMPOWERING OPTIONS®**, an organization specializing in personal empowerment. For the past 17 years Cheri has been teaching others how to turn obstacles into options. Cheri's warm, innovative approach focuses on how learned shame and dysfunctional beliefs from childhood dictates our behaviors as adults. She creates a shame-free, completely supportive and positive environment where you can easily understand, and explore the behavior patterns and ideas that no longer serve you.

In addition to working with individuals, groups and couples **EMPOWERING OPTIONS®** offers seminars, workshops, CD's, newsletters, and uniquely effective classes for couples. She provides a safe, encouraging environment for clients to look at how these patterns greatly shape how we experience relationships, work situations, and our own self-esteem; providing information, validation, and ideas that make it easier to create the changes you are looking for.

Cheri maintains a private practice, as well as, designs, produces and presents **EMPOWERING OPTIONS® Empower By Example** seminar series. Cheri also provides in-service training for school districts; customizes workshops, classes & training seminars for mental health professionals, communities.; consultation for a wide variety of businesses, and presents at national and state conferences. Cheri and her associates conduct a full time private practice in Chicago.

The more information, the easier it is to be in charge of our lives. Raising our esteem helps us reach our goals. For more information about relationships, parenting, new ideas, behaviors and options go to **www.EmpoweringOptions.com**

Natural Change Helps Create Closeness & Connection

By Cheri DeMoss

Natural change occurs when we let our partner's feelings touch us. When we let ourselves feel empathy & compassion for them. We start to look for options that will allow **both** people to get their needs met. There is a mutual understanding & **a sincere concern**.

Once natural change happens then the couple can come up with options & solutions that are mutually supportive & effective.

Trying to force our partner to change - no matter what style we use - is self defeating. It causes the person we love to feel bad about who they are. It causes them to feel distrustful & unsafe with us. It prevents us from making the intimate, human connection that we want from each other.

Whenever we talk to our partner in a manner that conveys dislike, judgment or implies wrongness - **we are trying to force them to change to make us emotionally comfortable** by making them feel wrong & bad.

The majority of us come from families that didn't

know how to or didn't believe they should have to take care of their own emotional needs.

Because of how our families made us change when we made them uncomfortable we have learned to do the same thing to our partners, our children or just about anyone who is close to us.

We often fall into pre-recorded behaviors to try to make our partner change to make us emotionally comfortable. We will try to make them:

- Deny their feelings or reality.
- Hide their thoughts or experiences.
- Do a different behavior out of guilt, fear, coercion, or emotional punishment.
- Prove they love us.
- Prove they are good.
- Make us emotionally comfortable.
- Tell us we are right & they are wrong.
- Diminish their wants, needs, & goals.
- Not trust.
- Not tell.
- Not feel.

Forcing the other person to change does not equal closeness or solutions to problems. Nor does it create permanent change. Instead it creates

fear, anger pain, sadness, loneliness & depression for both partners.

Connection comes from two people (each having their own side) understanding their partner's side as well as their own. This helps us esteem & accept the person that we love. It brings back the feeling that the person you love wants to understand you, not over ride you.

Once both partners feel connected then natural change happens. Natural change is what happens when, for example, you understand that your partner has an accent because they come from another country. You understand every time they talk they are trying their best to speak English correctly. You understand they feel self-conscious when they talk. So you don't correct them. You don't try to make them feel bad about their efforts. You don't try to make them change. You understand.

Both partners can genuinely feel for the other & can come up with options & solutions that are mutually supportive & accepting.

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Eliminate Always & Never

Using the words "Always" or "Never" stops your partner from hearing what you are trying to say to them. Using either word causes the other person to become defensive.

As soon as you say things like, "You never tell me your feelings," or "You always yell at me," the other person stops listening. Their focus shifts **from** what you're trying to convey **to** a list of exceptions. To the times they didn't do what you're accusing them of; to times they did good; times they got it right.

When we describe their behavior in terms of "never" or "always" we are usually implying that they are "never" good or "always" bad.

The goal of sharing our feelings is to give an honest, healthy explanation of what is going on for us. What we feel about their behaviors in the moment.

Replacing words like "always" or "never" with words like "often" and "seldom" is more accurate & helps both people

It doesn't serve the relationship to twist reality in order to back them into a defensive posture. Our families role-modeled how to distort things so that the other person (us) would feel irrevocably bad. Eliminating words like "always" or "never" will help both of you feel safer.

Inside . . .

**Classes For Couples
Fairness Is Essential
Eliminating "Always" and "Never"
Natural Change Creates Closeness**

**Page 1
Page 2&3
Page 4
Page 4**