

- **An ongoing issue lurks beneath the surface.** When you deny the issue, you displace your anger inappropriately onto lesser issues.
- **Unrealistic expectations of a relationship.** If you are comparing each other to some ideal, you will never be just plain "good enough".
- **Chemical dependency.** If a member of the family abuses alcohol or drugs-and attempts to interact while under the influence-you are almost certain to be unable to resolve issues or have a fulfilling relationship.
- **One or more members of the family feel trapped.** That takes place when you are unable to openly address the issues affecting you. ***

Restoring Communication.

Changing the destructive patterns in your family is a task that can be achieved **if everyone is willing to try**. Here are some suggestions on how to go about it.

- Try to **agree** that you will **stick together** until the end. You can argue about an issue without trying to wound each other by threatening to leave. It is essential to find a means of **resolving your disputes** rather than walking away from them.
- **Make a psychological prenuptial agreement.** This can help you to determine how you will deal with various issues that you may encounter at times of stress-when you may be less capable of handling them. The idea is to anticipate issues that you think you **may have** difficulty with, to work out solutions **before** emotions begin clouding things over. It is easier to resolve a potential problem than one that has become full-blown.
- **It is perfectly okay for family members to agree that certain topics are taboo.** Make an agreement to stay away from topics that may hurt or insult an other, then stick to that agreement.
- **Get into the habit of taking responsibility for your own feelings and not blaming an other family member.** The more you understand that it is **you and your own attitudes** that ultimately cause your emotions to develop, the less you will blame others, and the more you will become in control of your life in general.
- While having petty arguments, **try use humour** to lift the mood. If the time is right, making fun of yourselves and your quirks can be not only healing but fun.

- **Do not use an argument as a test for love.** This is what is happening when someone says, "If you really loved me, you would...". Usually, the other person feels trapped by a test like that. Does someone always have to "give in" to prove that they love the other person?
- **Avoid putting each other in a double bind.** Make sure you do not work to perpetuate your anger by neither of you giving the other a way out.
- **Try to get to the real issue.** The issue you are avoiding will not go away. If you continue to avoid the real issue, you are just prolonging the pain.
- **Fight the pattern of your arguments** rather than fight each other. That means do things differently from what you have been doing. **Breaking patterns** takes time and practice, especially if those patterns have built up during many repetitions. But to the extent that you **all agree** that you want more comfort and less pain in your relationship, breaking those old patterns **is possible**. ****
- **Get professional help.** In family therapy each partner, the children, and the couple as a separate entity is considered. A therapist is an impartial observer who often can help you to access the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship and of each member of the family, as well as everyone's potential to provide fulfilment to the other. So therapy can be either a vehicle for airing the issues in safety, healing the relationship, or for helping either or both partners and other members of the family to handle whatever issues they face. If you have opted to enter therapy or counselling and your partner has been unwilling, it might be a good idea for you to make an appointment on your own to discuss the situation. Often a therapist can help you to develop a strategy to bring your partner into the process. If you yourself have been in individual therapy and your partner objects to going to see your therapist, honour that objection and find a person who will be acceptable to both of you. Your own therapist may be as impartial as can be, even if you have in individual therapy with that person for quite a while. However, your partner may not believe that this is the case and may fear being ganged up on. This is especially true if you are a lot more therapy-wise than is your partner. When this is the case, the best course of action may be to let your partner pick the therapist. Remember, to the extent that you understand what your issues are and work with each other, your relationships have the potential to grow steadily stronger. ****

Information in this pamphlet is taken from: * "God, Help Me Stop", Claire W. ** "The Art of Staying Together ", CDr. Michael S Broder *** "The Freedom We Crave", William Linters **** "The Twelve Steps, Friends in Recovery ***** "When Good Things Become Addictions", Dr. Grant Martin



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WELFARE SOCIETY
CARING FOR CULTURALLY AND
LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE
COMMUNITIES

GETTING ALONG— Communication Tips for Youth & Parents

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Relationships that work.

Naturally, all relationships are different, but those that work have similarities. In general, they hold on to two important elements—passion and comfort. Following is a list of more specific traits and attitudes that characterize the foundation of most workable long-term relationships.

- **They recognize that an issue that affects one person will affect everyone else in the family.** These families usually do not consider an issue resolved unless or until they find a win/win solution that favours all members.
- **They value** their relationship because it **fulfills the needs** of each member of the family.
- **They think** in terms of **each other's long-range** best interests and exhibit the ability to grow both separately and together.
- **They like, trust, and respect each other.** These feelings transcend their disagreements.
- **They mutually support each other's pursuit** of what is important to each family member.
- **They share** an acceptable number of **common interests.**
- **They share power.** No one dominates the others.
- **They do not rely on each other** for all of their validation. They are able to get many of their needs fulfilled outside of their relationship.
- Every member of the family has a degree of **self-reliance.** They are comfortable with and are able to accept themselves to the same degree they expect acceptance from each other.
- **They have similar values** in most important areas and have worked out a way to handle disagreements in others.
- **They are compatible** to a degree that satisfies each member.
- **They are interdependent.** They know they can rely on each other and believe that they are stronger acting together than separately.
- **They give each other** a sufficient amount of **attention** and **appreciation.**

- **They respect** each other's **privacy** and need at times to “stand on one's own two feet.”
- **Every member** of the family together and separately **takes responsibility to give their relationship the time and attention** it needs and deserves. *

Setting or Re-examining “The Rules”.

What are the issues in your family? Rules that your parents have depended on may not work for you. It is important to develop new clarity and understanding of our own family rules, especially when there are adolescents in the family.

- You may need to **examine your rules** about quantity and quality of time you spend with your partner and your children.
- Arguments about **financial matters** are often about control issues. In successful relationships, each member has their own amount of discretionary money, and your **financial limitations** as a family becomes a **shared problem.**
- Successful families realize that the optimal way to **divide up duties** is to **allow each member to be in charge** of one individual area. Usually one member is more meticulous in some respects than an other.
- **Openness** about your feelings as well as **respect** for the other's **friendships** are essential if every member of the family is to be comfortable .
- If in-laws and other relatives are a problem in your family, in all likelihood one member is “**siding**” with them against some other member.
- Families in which both partners have **established careers** have an especially difficult time setting or re-establishing priorities. This situation calls for an enormous amount of **mutual flexibility.**
- If some members of the family constantly fight, their communication styles definitely need to be looked at. Often, families fight by attacking each other at a deeply personal level, rather than **dealing with the specific issue** that is causing the tension.
- Successful families **put each other first.**
- Successful families have a **consistent approach to discipline** and collaborate closely. **

Reasons your family relationships may be “stormy”.

“Stormy” relationships **are never just one person's problem.** When there are problems, disagreements and arguments every member of the family is affected. To the extent that you are in a relationship that is characterized by storminess, see how many of the following apply to your situation.

- **You love each other-but you do not respect each other.** This means that you are capable of making each other feel very good at times, but when those good feelings go away, either or both of you are left feeling a chronic void. And each of you blames the other for creating that feeling of emptiness.
- **You have low (or no) tolerance for frustration.** One member of the family or more, find frustration so difficult to handle that they overreact.
- **You project the things you like least about yourself onto others.** When this happens, lack of tolerance for your own shortcomings gets converted into anger that is directed at an other person. In reality, this anger at yourself is fuelled by low self-esteem.
- **You believe that virtually everything must be shared.** One or more members of the family may feel that it is perfectly fine to exploit the vulnerabilities of an other.
- **You feel unlovable.** If this is the case, you may escalate any disagreement into a feeling of being rejected as a person. The issue is forgotten; because that “unloved” feeling becomes uppermost.
- **One of you seeks to control the other.** Relationships that fail are often the result of one member trying to play a domineering, controlling role.
- **Displacement of anger.** For instance, when you attack a family member with anger that is really meant for your boss etc.
- **Winning the other member becomes a game.** Unless this pattern is broken, fights will not diminish.
- **Lack of communication about intimacy.** You or an other family member cannot tolerate the same amount of intimacy on a consistent basis. Each person differs as to just how much closeness is optimal.
- **You are too dependent.** If you feel that you have to count on each other to support feelings of happiness and well-being, you blame the other when you begin feeling your own personal feelings of inadequacy.
- **You are the product of poor relationship modelling.** Perhaps the only way you ever learned how to resolve conflict was by observing your parents. But, one thing that works for one may not work for an other.