

Marriage Recovery

DOESN'T TALK ABOUT ANYTHING SERIOUS

Conversation is Important

It is common for us to blame others for not wanting to talk about some of the things we think we need to talk about. We sometimes suggest that it must be some kind of genetic disorder or defect. I am here to say that is NOT the problem.

If others do not want to talk about a serious or tough issue, it is because they believe that it won't do any good. Either they are not good at dialogue, or you are not good at it, or possibly you both are not good at dialogue. At least this is what you think.

The place to start is with the realization that you cannot change others, you can only change yourself. Therefore start with yourself. Your partner may have a fear of all crucial conversations, like, "What's wrong now?" That aversion to all crucial conversations probably includes talking to a counselor. Therefore, you are the only person you can work on (even with a counselor).

Start with simple challenges. Don't wait for the really big ones to come along before you try it. It is most important that you start with making it safe to talk about any present issue, no matter how small it is. Constantly watch when your partner starts to become uncomfortable as you are talking. One way to do this is to use tentative language. "I'm pretty sure you are not intending to....." This will separate your **intent** from the **outcome** you are working toward. When you find your partner consistently seems uncomfortable or even unwilling to talk about his or her personal issues you need the help of your counselor. You will need to explore other dialogue skills every chance you get.

With the help of a counselor, you will now need to exercise patience. Do not nag. Do not lose hope either, because that will send you into silence or violence. Every time you become pushy, aggressive and certainly when you get insulting, you will give your partner additional evidence that the crucial

conversations you want to have do nothing but cause more problems.

With the help of your counselor you will develop your best dialogue behavior; you will also build more safety in your relationship and your partner will become more likely to begin to pick up cues that it is safe to talk about a crucial subject.

The next step will be to get your partner to talk with you about HOW you talk. This can become a mutual purpose of building safety into your conversations. Your partner needs to see a **reason** for having this conversation. Hopefully it will become a reason that is so compelling that he or she will be willing to take part.

Share what you think the consequences of having or not having this conversation could be. Explain what it means to both you and your relationship. Then invite both of you to list items it is hard to talk about. Take turns observing how each of you approach such topics. Then discuss the possible benefits of helping each other make improvements.

Sometimes it is easier to talk about HOW you talk or HOW you don't talk than to talk about issues.

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