

MY PART IN THIS RELATIONSHIP

("What do I bring to my relationship?")



As mentioned in a previous exercise, it takes two to bring a relationship to the present state of affairs. It is easy to blame my partner for what is "wrong" and to expect my partner to "change" so that the relationship can be "better." If anything is to really change in the relationship it will be up to me to evaluate *my* part and transform the negativity into something positive. If nothing else changes but my own part, then the relationship would certainly be different. I cannot continue to play "you first" and wait for my partner to "change" so that things can be better. If I am grumbling inside and telling myself, "I'm always doing all the changing" I can be glad that it is in my hands to transform the quality of our relationship. Otherwise, I can only play the victim.

If my partner is doing something destructive to him or herself and bringing that destructive behavior into the relationship, I must realize that I cannot live my life trying to "fix" him or her. I must take care of myself. This does not mean that I have to "put up" with negative behavior. I can point out what I observe, I can communicate the effect, I can take a stand for *myself* but I am not living in an illusion that this will guarantee that my partner will do anything different. Nevertheless, it is often valuable to bring things up if I am bothered as long as I am not coming from attack. I can own it as my problem and seek to do something for myself. When I come from simple awareness I can realize my choices and trust that my concerns have been heard.

The next few exercises are tools to help you evaluate your own behavior and beliefs, which you hold that affect your relationship.

My "Shoulds" and "Musts"

("How do I control things?")

Many of the problems in my relationship are not because of the negative events that occur. Instead problems can often be redefined as the "beliefs" that I hold about certain events. It is not the event itself or my partner's behavior that is necessarily the problem but rather *how I see the event or behavior*. The way I see (perceive) an event, situation or behavior depends on the beliefs I hold. If the event does not "fit" my beliefs, then I have "good reason" to be upset. When I can examine my beliefs that simply don't work then *I* become in charge of the problem and therefore the solution.

Many so-called problems can be easily "solved" simply by letting go that something "must" be a certain way. This does not mean that I wouldn't "like" or "prefer" or "desire" or even expect that something occur but this

does not mean that I "must" get upset if it is not that way. When I can give up trying to change the relationship into my image of how the relationship "should", or "must" be then I can allow the relationship to be *what it is*. Allowing the relationship to be "what it is" creates an environment for it to change and grow *by itself*. I don't have to control it; I don't have to try and make it into something that it is not.

"Shoulds" are statements of belief and "musts" are the demands that the beliefs be made real. We say, in effect, "This is the way it 'should' be and I demand that it "must" be this way." You have tried and tried to make certain "shoulds" real and you have been unsuccessful in your attempts. The way that you can tell if a "should" or a "must" is operating in your life is to notice the things that you complain about most. Below are some common irrational beliefs that generate certain "shoulds" and "musts". Simply check the ones you can relate to and then elaborate honestly in your journal how you see this "belief" operating in your relationship. Notice that many upsets are a result of reality not fitting into our "shoulds" or "musts".

- **Belief #1** **You must love and approve of me just the way I am**
What is: You may not like everything about me
What's possible: I could concentrate on my own self-respect and self approval

- **Belief #2** **You (I) should be punished and condemned for your (my) negative behavior**
What is: You (I) do things that negatively impact your (my) life and the people around you (me)
What's possible: Your (My) poor behavior does not make you (me) a rotten horrible person

- **Belief #3** **When things don't go the way I would like them to go, it is horrible, terrible and awful.**
What is: Sometimes things don't go the way I would like them to go.
What's possible: I could change what I am able to change and accept what I can't change.

- **Belief #4** **My external circumstances are responsible for my bad feelings**
What is: I feel what I feel *in response* to certain circumstances
What's possible: I can take responsibility for my feelings and learn to work with them or let them go.

- ☐Belief #5 I must be worried and obsessed about fearful possibilities**
What is: There are some things that can happen in life that are fearful
What's possible: I could trust, I could just as well consider positive outcomes as negative, I could know that I don't know
- ☐Belief #6 It is easier to avoid difficulties and hope that they will work themselves out**
What is: Some things are difficult to deal with
What's possible: I could face the difficulty and deal with it
- ☐Belief #7 I need someone or something stronger or greater than myself on which to rely**
What is: I may not feel that I have the inner resources to deal with certain things
What's possible: I could develop my own inner resources
- ☐Belief #8 I should be thoroughly competent, intelligent and achieving in all possible respects**
What is: There are some things that I don't know and don't know how to do
What's possible: I could do better and accept where I am and know that I am not perfect
- ☐Belief #9 Because something negative happened in my life I should always be upset about it**
What is: Some bad things have happened in my life
What's possible: I could learn to let go of my upsets, I can learn from the past, I could let go of my attachment to it.
- ☐Belief #10 I must be in control and have perfect control over certain things**
What is: I am not in control of others, there are some things that are impossible to control
What's possible: I can flow with things the way they are and learn to enjoy my life despite certain events.
- ☐Belief #11 I must be comfortable to insure my happiness**
What is: Being comfortable is being bored with life
What's possible: I can be vitally absorbed in creative pursuits or devote myself to people or projects outside myself.

Acknowledging My Negative Behavior

(“What is my act?”)

Negative behavior arises out of negative emotions. Negative emotions arise out of negative thoughts. Negative thoughts are of your own making and are decisions and beliefs about how you, your partner or your relationship “should” be. It is helpful but often difficult to acknowledge our own behavior as the source of the difficulties in our relationship. When we are willing to see clearly and acknowledge our own behavior we can take steps to eliminate or transform it. But it is not enough to simply change our behavior. Instead we must get to the *source* of that behavior which is in our own thoughts and beliefs. We can get to that source by first seeing our negative behavior which is the *manifestation* of our negative thoughts and beliefs which we hold about ourselves.

Below are some patterns of behavior, which we tend to play out in our relationships. These are typically “character” patterns that reflect our personality, and are relatively “fixed” ways of relating to others. We mostly learned these behaviors from our family either because they were modeled for us or because it became our fixed way of reacting to a dysfunctional situation. Look them over and check off the ones you can identify with. You might find yourself in many of these patterns but one will generally stand out above all others. Check the one you can most relate to and then journal on it. When journaling see if you can identify where this behavior *came from*. What *effect* does this behavior have on my relationship? See if you can identify what *function* this behavior might have played in your own family. And lastly, see if you can “own” this behavior as your own choosing.

I’m a scorekeeper

- I keep score of the things my partner does such as leisure time, outings with friends, hours with the children and chores completed
- I make sure that my partner never gets the upper hand and never gets by with a “freebie”
- I bank “points” which I hold over my partner’s head for leverage.
- I make concessions in a negotiating manner rather than offer them as a gift of support.
- I seldom if ever do something in support of my partner without making sure that he or she knows it, including a detailed explanation of the imposition it created for me.

☐ I'm a faultfinder

- I seldom if ever let an infraction by my partner slide by, regardless of how trivial
- I find myself saying such things as, "You should have known better." "You should have helped me out when I was stressed." "You should have done what I wanted without me having to ask".
- I tend to say "always" and "never" when criticizing my partner. "You always do this." "You never help me out in the kitchen". "You always ignore me."
- I tend to complain about how I am not getting what I deserve or that life is unfair to me--an attitude that I quickly transfer to my partner as if he or she is to blame.
- I counterattack with criticism whenever I am being criticized.
- I am obsessively interested in getting my partner to admit to wrongdoing rather than listening to what my partner has to say.

☐ I believe it is my way or the highway

- I am intolerant of my partner's initiatives or ideas
- I regularly interrupt my partner during conversations so I can get in what I want to say instead of patiently allowing my partner to finish what he or she has to say.
- I turn things back on my partner when I realize that my partner is making a good point. I say things like, "You don't have to use that tone of voice", "There's no reason for you to look that way", "Why do you relish trying to hurt me."
- I cannot end a confrontation until my partner acknowledges that I am right.
- If my partner won't admit that I am right, I tend to sulk or act like a martyr, making sure that my partner understands that I don't feel appreciated.
- I assume a saintly, pious tone with friends and family, telling them about all I have to put up with, about how my partner is impossible to live with.
- I tend to start sentences with guilt inducing sentences like, "If you loved me..." or "If you cared for me..." or "I told you so; you should have listened."

I turn into an attack dog

- My interactions are marked by a very harsh tone of voice and often by "in your face" shouting.
- My body language is marked with a curled upper lip, a pointed finger in the face, a "killer stare" or exaggerated eye rolling.
- My comments are laden with condescension and sarcasm, such as "Well *you* really turned out to be a great catch."
- My comments are filled with "you" statements such as "You make me sick", "You disgust me", "You are stupid and worthless."
- I purposely attack my partner's vulnerable areas and values.
- I withhold from my partner that which I know they want and need to have peace in their life.
- I seek to manage my partner with intimidation, both physical and mental/emotional.

I am a passive warmonger

- After listening to my partner make a suggestion, I agree with it, then a few minutes later I start talking about why the suggestion will fail rather than how it could succeed.
- I feign confusion when my partner explains simple rationales for changing something in the relationship that I happen to like.
- I feign ineptness over activities that I don't like to do.
- I feign illness or I come up with "reasons" that tend to interfere with plans made by my partner that I don't like.
- I sometimes start sentences with the phrase, "yeah, but..."

I resort to smoke and mirrors

- I constantly focus on superficial and trivial topics
- When interactions begin to focus on real issues I disrupt the conversation by anger, abrupt changes of subject, or withdrawal.
- I tend to talk passionately about the problems of other people that mirror what is really bothering me, but when confronted I deny its relevance.

- I become very defensive if my partner directly asks me if there is anything bothering me.
- I am a master of defensiveness. I always know how to direct attention away from myself if the questions get too personal. I am good at self-protection.

I will not forgive or let go

- I am so consumed with anger at my partner that I will explode over the smallest disagreements or difficulties
- I am so bitter I take a pessimistic view of life in general.
- My body feels physically unbalanced because of stress.
- I cannot read a book or watch TV or a movie without finding something in it that reminds me of my resentment.
- I keep in my memory bank the imperfections of my partner, remembering all the mistakes and failures he or she has made, and I bring them up constantly.
- I interpret many statements and actions of my partner in a negative fashion, based on the slimmest thread of evidence or often no evidence at all.
- I won't forgive my partner because he or she is not acting sorry or apologetic enough or has not done enough things for me in order to pay "penance."
- I try to control my partner through shame rather than seeking to inspire my partner.

I am a bottomless pit

- I talk myself out of friendships and relationships because I think the person I like is out of my league
- I fear rejection for voicing an opinion. I'd rather not say something than risk the disapproval of others, and when I do talk I wonder if I am making the right impression
- I find myself saying "thank you" or "I'm sorry" frequently and unnecessary
- I talk myself out of trying something new with my partner, from horseback riding to counseling, because I don't want to look stupid

- When I am complimented, I immediately downplay whatever I did that led to the compliment.
- When I buy presents for others, I worry if they are "right" or "good enough".
- I state my beliefs as questions, asking my partner what he or she feels about certain subjects that are important to me, instead of declaring my position and taking a stand
- Instead of expressing anger, I become tearful and play the victim
- I am so sensitive and thin-skinned about any criticism that my partner cannot tease me or joke with me, and he or she cannot tell me the truth when I need to hear it.
- No matter what the question with regard to making plans, my answer is always the same: "I don't know, I don't care. Whatever you want to do."

I am too comfortable

- I never talk about such subjects as where our relationship is going, what my deepest desires are, what I dream about, what gives me passion.
- I'm tired even after a good night's sleep, and I find it hard to keep my eyes open after dinner.
- I sit for extended periods of time watching television
- I tell myself that I can't do things because I don't have the willpower
- My first reaction to almost any suggestion by my partner is "no." I don't have the desire to go somewhere new or try something that is not part of the regular routine of my life.
- Anything involving risk to my current lifestyle is definitely avoided. As a result my lifestyle offers no challenge and no stimulation.
- I feel emotional talk is bothersome and sort of silly. I roll my eyes when I hear someone say, "Why don't you express your feelings?"
- I say, "I don't know" to so many questions. "I don't know why that happened to me." "I wish I knew why I did that". I have closed my mind and decided it is not worth the work anymore of trying to understand what is happening to me.

I have given up

- I have consciously accepted a dull pain as a way of life.
- I feel a regular sense of malaise or lack of energy.
- I have surrendered to the reality of just "going through the motions" in a motionless relationship.
- I often think or say, "What's the use? It will never change."
- I no longer even bother to protest when attacked or abused by my partner.
- I think it is pointless to try and change because it will only make my partner angry.
- I feel lonely
- I have begun to turn to other people or activities in search of fulfillment
- I express disappointment in the relationship covertly, constantly becoming "ill" for instance and having to spend days in bed, or even turning to prescription pills or alcohol or twice-a-week sessions with a therapist