

mid-March 2009 NEWSLETTER

THEME: Stress - Part Two (of three) Managing Stress in Relationships

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SELF TRANSFORMATION
THERAPY

IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome to part 2 (of 3) in this series on stress. Part one focused on stress in our everyday decisions. I suggested that stress is often trying to do something at the wrong time or in a way that is not right for you. I need to emphasise that this approach needs to be checked against avoidance of an action due to fear, or rushing into something due to the desire of a quick fix or a preferred outcome. Self-knowledge is required to discern the truth of the matter, and is one aspect of the development of your own wisdom. Part 2 will focus on stress in relationships.



mid-March 2009 'Thought of the Month': Managing Stress in Relationships



Stress between couples in an intimate relationship is often due to the challenge of balancing the needs of self and other. This can be reduced to two areas: 1) whose needs are going to be met first or more often and 2) whose opinions, values or decisions are going to be more often approved or acted upon. For an intimate relationship to succeed, the needs to be respect and consideration for both self AND other.

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Thought of the Month Article:

Part two examines stress within relationships. This is a huge topic which could fill many books. Stress in relationships can be due to so many factors, such as finance, matters over the children, running of the house and many numerous decisions, both important and everyday ones.

Quite often, communication that is conflicted or tense, is happening in two layers. A couple may have tense discussions or arguments over seemingly trivial matters. However, these are usually symptomatic of an underlying unresolved issue. One way to characterise these underlying issues, is that they are a conflict between self VERSUS other. These can often be characterised into two areas, which reflect typical masculine and feminine psychological challenges:

1. Whose needs are going to be met first or most often?
2. Whose opinions, values or decisions are going to be approved or acted upon?

In the first point, having your needs met can include being listened to, feeling loved and valued, being allowed to do what you wish to, having your physical needs met, such as a cooked meal and a clean house, or any other practical or emotional need.

Typically, it is the woman who will more often meet the needs of those in the family or relationship, while being prone to neglecting themselves or putting themselves second. However, if a giving person does not have adequate assertion or belief in their own worth to have the favour returned, it can indicate a pattern of guilt and a fear of neglecting or hurting others.

Therefore, while a person in this type of pattern may complain they are always doing everything for others, they will need to connect to their own masculine strength to more often stand their ground, while believing they deserve more.

In the second point, having opinions, values or decisions given credit can include giving each other equal time to state their opinions, with an open attitude to listen and consider what is being said, and to negotiate an outcome.

It is also more important to a man to be productive and capable. Therefore, if this is a significant issue for a man, he may have the need to appear correct, and will have difficulty admitting his faults or wrong doings. What a man displaying this pattern of behaviour may do is complain that nobody listens to their advice. This is because a problem is often being approached logically, without emotions being given time to be processed.

In this instance, a man would benefit from connection to his own feminine empathy and place importance on feelings when processing issues and situations. Before this can be achieved, a man needs to be comfortable admitting he is wrong, while not viewing feelings of doubt and inadequacy as weakness.

What these two patterns of behaviour are indicating is that while romantic love may fade in a relationship, you cannot automatically assume it has been transcended or worked through. Romantic love is the notion that the damsel in distress requires a knight in shining armour. And while the giddiness of romantic love may fade, the two behaviour dynamics outlined above display the ongoing issues of the all-powerful protector and stressed and tired damsel.

While these dynamics can be complex and even require couples therapy, there can be some useful ways to approach any tensions regarding needs and decisions.

Needs:

- express gratitude or thanks when your partner does something, no matter how small
- look for ways to return the favour or deed, and do it with joy
- both partners need to be aware of their and their partner's moods and cycles and allow some extra accommodation when they are tired or under strain.
- initiate spontaneous affection as long as you feel able to be in the moment to give it
- deliberately engender a co-operative attitude, especially regarding looking after the children
- ensure there is give and take with chores and tasks
- take the responsibility to express when you are tired or not coping, or need some extra help, as oppose to becoming angry because your partner can't mind-read how you are going

Decisions, values and opinions:

- listen with your full attention when your partner is talking to you
- truly believe that your partner has equally valid opinions even if they differ greatly
- when tension rises, it is important to express what you are feeling, or assist your partner to do this
- have a mindset that decisions based on feelings and values are as valid as logical choices, as long as they are not being driven by significant fears or desires
- negotiate differences with the joint aim to find a compromise decision or action

What this all boils down to is this:

- communicate, communicate, communicate!!!
- be aware of how you are coping and express your needs
- be mindful of how your partner is managing and encourage them to talk or ask for help
- consciously develop a joint partnership based on equality, love, trust and respect

Finally, the aim is not to remove all tensions, but increase the capacity to listen, express, know each other and live with a togetherness engendered from love and respect.

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