

The Couples Cure

Miraculous Recovery for Couples on the Brink

Phase II: Authentic Self-Expression (Inside-Out)

Lesson 6: The Pitfalls of Communication

Now we're moving into lesson six -- Communication Pitfalls. Now that we've cleared out the resentments and started at least unpacking the process of forgiveness, if not truly and completely forgiven the past, we're ready to start the next chapter with a clean slate or at least a cleaner slate and some healthy communication tools. Part of authentic self-expression, in this phase two of the process, is going to be eliminating the unhealthy or ineffective communication approaches that you've learned and then internalizing what truly works so that you can have successful conversations, even if you have a difference of opinion so that you can problem-solve together and just pave the way for healthy collaboration and being on the same team, even if you have a different point of view. That's ultimately the goal. In lesson seven, we're going to get into the 'how to's,' like, what we're going to do and what's the master toolkit that I want you guys to learn, in terms of authentic self-expression and communication.

First, we're going to look at some of the 'don'ts' in lesson six. This is why we call it the communication pitfalls. These are the biggest challenges that people have with communication. I love this quote because it really captures one of the biggest challenges that we have in relationships, which is miscommunication or misunderstandings, just not hearing each other in the way that you intended to be heard and vice versa. The quote is: "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." by George Bernard Shaw. This is so true, like, how many times do you have a fight because you had a misunderstanding? You thought that something was clear and that's not how they remembered it or you thought you were heard, but it turns out that you weren't. We hear things differently with our filters on and through our bad habits and our limiting beliefs, we hear things that maybe were not completely accurate and so we lose information in the translation. That's really what this is speaking to.

For this lesson, we're going to be moving into the realm of tools, like I said, but I want to look at what doesn't work and identify some of the biggest pitfalls that you need to be aware of. Then, we'll be looking at the building blocks of powerful and loving communication next. The thing I want to get across most at the beginning at the outset of this lesson is really just that no matter how long you've been stuck in these ineffective ways, I promise you that you can make these habits, these new habits, for life. It's hard to imagine, I know when I was going through this as I was putting together the material, I was thinking, *if I had heard this years ago, I would have thought that it's really not possible to stop doing some of these things or that it's just not possible to change my habits that much.* Now, I look and I see, *wow, it is true. It really can. You can really have a whole new reality.* No matter how much you feel, like, this is pie in the sky or no matter how discouraged you feel as we go through this and you recognize yourself in many of these pitfalls, I just want you to remember that you absolutely can make these new habits for life. Especially because now you know how to clear out the old beliefs that get in the way. You have more clarity on your boundaries. You know how to repair the past. You know how to build emotional connection. You know when you have fallen out of connection. The next step really is just now you're ready to be mindful of what the communication pitfalls are. I've broken these down into two categories:

Communication Problems result from:

1. Disempowered Mindset
2. Damaging Strategies

The first one is internal and the second one is external. The first category really speaks to how we feel on the inside and what our emotional or mental stance is. The second category is really addressing the execution and expression of what we want to say, the actual moves, the actual techniques that we're using. We really need to look at both. I think it's helpful to look at them both separately because one does not lead to the other. It's important to be able to separate these. We have more control that way.

DISEMPOWERED MINDSET

So let's first talk about the disempowered mindset. There are seven internal states that cause communication breakdowns. I'm gonna go into these in detail more, but right now, I'm just gonna list them real quick:

1. The need to be right
2. Blame
3. Defensiveness
4. Fear of speaking the truth
5. Righteous Rage
6. Weak internal boundaries
7. Victimhood

We're going to go through these one by one. As you listen to these, I want you just to kind of take notes and be aware of which ones apply to you. If you can write down which disempowered mindset you can relate to and then examples of those in your journal as you go along.

THE NEED TO BE RIGHT

This one we talked about in lesson two already. This is where I mentioned that Terry Real had identified losing strategies. He identified five losing strategies in the New Rules of Marriage. But I really see this one more as an internal state and an inner desire, as opposed to an actual strategy or technique or approach. So I've decided to put this in under the category of the disempowered mindset. This idea that we have to be right.

This is driven by limiting beliefs such as:

- If you aren't right, you are wrong, you are losing, you are weak and there is ego involved to protect yourself. A lot of people believe that if they're not right, they're wrong. That belief that *if I'm not right, I'm wrong, I'm losing, I'm weak*. There's *I need to protect my ego* or *I need to protect my identity*. Something is at stake here if I'm not right.
- If you are not RIGHT, that you are somehow not valid
Not only are you wrong or weak, but it could be that you just don't feel like you have any validity or anything worthwhile to stake your claiming. You don't feel that you can stand strong and say, "I believe in the life dream behind what I am advocating for." If we grew up in invalidating environments, this will fuel that need to be right. It comes from a place of historically not have ever been validated or acknowledged.
- If we don't agree on this, then that means there is no way forward
It's also driven by the belief that if we don't agree on something, then that means there's no way forward, which is simply not true. But I really suffered from this a lot in the beginning of my marriage. I really thought that if I didn't get my husband to see it my way, well then, we weren't going to be able to solve it. If we can't identify the problem as the same thing, if we can't diagnose it the same way, then we cannot address it and that's not true, fortunately. And I will teach you other ways to get around this but we operate from that assumption unconsciously. We're not even aware that that's what's at stake and so we keep going and want to be right and we get really hooked into arguments, as a result of this belief.
- If they don't agree with you, they don't hear you.
It also can come from the unmet need from childhood of just being heard, like I sort of alluded to in the broader sense of that now no matter what you're talking about. It's not even about the thing itself. It's just that there's a need to be heard that is so strong that somewhere in your conditioning, you've equated being heard with being right or that being heard means people agree with you. That if they don't agree with you they don't hear you, which is another misconception or sort of false equation, I think, in our minds. That of course leads to some of the strategies we're going to be talking about next. But I want to stay focused on the internal states right now.

BLAME

The next internal state is blame. Blame is essentially a state of mind. It's assigning responsibility for wrongdoing or fault. It's a failure of boundaries in that regard because it's caused by that viewing control outside yourself.

- Caused by an external locus of control

Maybe we've been taught that we have no power or maybe you've been taught you have no voice or maybe it's just a way of seeing the world that you inherited from your parents, who grew up that way or that's just how communication occurred in your family. It's essentially this filter that tells you that what's outside of you is the thing that is causing your experience. That's essentially what it is.

- Driven by the urge to dispel negative emotion

It's also driven by the urge to dispel negative emotion. This is an example of my own blaming tendencies, I used to come home and I walk into the entryway and I'd see shoes laying everywhere, backpacks thrown and jackets thrown and socks all over the house. And I would just want to know, like, *who did this? Why is this here and who did this? Who is responsible for this?* So that I could know where to direct that emotion. There's that urge to like release that negative emotion and in order to do that, you have to know where to direct it.

- Comes from the needs for others to be wrong

It also comes from the need for others to be wrong so that we can feel right, which is really sort of piggybacking on the first thing that we talked about. If they take the blame then we can be made whole or taken care of. Underneath that assumption is, *if they can just be wrong, then I'll be taken care of.* They'll admit it. This need, along with the urge to dispel negative emotion, if we really look closely, we can see that there's positive intentions behind that mindset. That if we can recognize the positive intentions even though it's misguided in terms of our mental stance, in our inner states, but if we can really see more clearly, shine a light on that, what the secondary gain is for that, then we can find more functional ways going forward to express that need.

- Attempt to gain a sense of control

Blame is also an attempt to gain a sense of control. We would rather feel like it's somebody else's fault than feel powerless. We'd rather blame ourselves than feel powerless. We'd rather not be our fault obviously than have it be our fault because it feels bad. If we have limiting beliefs about what that means, to take responsibility for something, if we own a mistake or something or if we own our part in something, we might take that as, *that means that I did something wrong*, and that's not necessarily true. Taking ownership and blame are not the same thing. It's sort of this faulty assumption that we operate from, that fault means wrong simply than just a mistake or something that just happened, that in and of itself, it has no value other than what we assign to it.

- Opposite of vulnerability

The other thing I want to mention is that blame is the opposite of vulnerability. It's not sharing. It's not opening up. It's pointing at other people. It's talking about them not you. It's not saying how you feel. It's not talking about the meaning that you give something. It's not talking about what you need. It's just talking about what somebody else did wrong. It doesn't work because it leads to the actions of criticism and we're going to get into that in a minute. But it's a position of non-acceptance, that's essentially what blame is. If really fundamentally, it's a position of non-acceptance. I have to blame somebody for something that shouldn't have happened, something that was wrong, and it's fighting with reality, so it's not even constructive. It's just a negative, toxic expression of a sense of powerlessness. It's not a good idea to live here, even if you're right. Even if you know you're right, there's better ways to get what you need than through holding a blaming stance in your mind.

DEFENSIVENESS

The next disempowered mindset is defensiveness as a stance. Defensiveness, by this definition, is really a habitual intention to protect yourself from being exposed for any shortcomings or failures or mistakes. It's just a way of being in the world of, like, *everything I do is to protect myself from being exposed for my shortcomings.* It's a knee-jerk response to real or perceived threats to our identity or ego. We'll get into the specific ways that we get defensive later but right now, I'm still just talking about the inner states.

- Self-protection to ward off a perceived attack

It's essentially self-protection to ward off what's perceived as an attack, and whether it is or not, is actually not important. A lot of times, we get defensive when we perceive something as an attack and it's not even attack. Maybe it is an attack but we don't have to take it in, so we really want to avoid this. This happens to the best of us. This is something that we have been taught to do in a world where vulnerability is associated with weakness.

- Covert way of blaming

Defensiveness can also be a covert way of blaming. Like, if we're kind of defending ourselves and fishing for excuses so that our spouse will back off of whatever they're saying, then that's really a way of shifting responsibility or blaming your partner and by saying, "in fact, the problem isn't me, it's you." So, like an example of this would be if somebody says to their spouse, "hey, did you call your parents to let them know that we're not coming tonight like you said you would?" Then they get defensive and say, "I was just too busy today. You know what my day looked like. Why didn't you just do it?" That's a defensive response but it's also a covert way of blaming.

- Natural result of criticism

The thing to realize about this is that defensiveness is the natural result of criticism. It is very difficult to not get defensive if you're being criticized. We should not allow criticism in our relationships. We should hold boundaries against criticism. We should not engage criticism. That is the original culprit, a lot of times, in this dynamic of like criticism defensiveness. Ultimately, we have to own our own defensiveness as a reaction that doesn't work no matter what.

- Unhealthy reaction to complaint or request

It can also be a very unhealthy reaction to a complaint or a request because it's a misperception most of the time. The brain is responding as though it sees danger. It sees an attack where there really isn't one and then things go off the rails because you go into fight or flight. When you see danger, you're not operating with mindfulness. You're not even really operating from your functional adult conscious mind and that's going to derail the topic at hand.

- Block to emotional connection

Defensiveness is also one of the biggest blocks to emotional connection. You simply cannot connect with your spouse if they can't feel heard or if you can't feel heard or seen because of defensiveness.

- Result of limiting beliefs or shame

Defensiveness is the result of limiting beliefs or shame, that's another thing I wanted to mention. There's this belief that *if I'm getting feedback, I must be a failure*. If we have a limiting belief that *it's not okay to be imperfect, that we must be perfect* or if we have a belief that *my spouse doesn't like something, that means something I did is wrong*, then we're going to be defensive. In that sense, defensiveness is the outgrowth of limiting beliefs and internal shame that we might have inherited, that we might have brought to the relationship or it could be the result of shame that's happened in the relationship. But either way, it's definitely a disempowered mindset that will not lead to anything good.

- Comes from neutral questions

The other thing I want to mention about defensiveness, too, is that it comes not just from blame or limiting beliefs. It also comes from things that seem like neutral questions. Let's say you ask your spouse, "Hey, why did you do that?" or "How did you end up not doing that thing you said you would?" or "Why didn't you do that?" "Why did you do it this way?" Anytime we ask a question that requires them to explain themselves to you, even if you're calm, the structure of the question requires an explanation which creates a defensive stance. So really be aware of that. You might feel, like, *gosh, they're so defensive. All I did was ask a question*. But if your question structurally requires them to explain themselves to you, they're already on the defensive. Does that make sense? That's something that I learned in my relationship just like, *oh, I can see why that would make my husband defensive even though I thought I was so much better*. I thought that I was just asking questions to seek understanding but the reason I was asking those questions to seek understanding is because I was trying to figure out a way not to judge something and he could feel that. People can feel that, like, *they're asking that question because something isn't right. They're having a problem with something*. Even though it's a step in the right direction, right from criticism, that would create defensiveness. Asking questions like that that require a defense or explanation is going to bring about defensiveness as well.

FEAR OF SPEAKING THE TRUTH

Another really disempowered mindset is the fear of speaking the truth. This is so common among avoiders. We have some avoiders in the group. Even non-avoiders still fear speaking the truth, even though they do, even if not in the best of ways, but it's especially apparent in avoidant couples where there's so many things that are just never spoken because of that fear.

- Caused condition response or limiting beliefs

This fear is usually conditioned response from limiting beliefs from times we might not even remember in our lives, where it

really wasn't safe to speak the truth about how we feel. It involves deeply held subconscious assumptions built around that safety and worthiness that we might not be aware of. If you had parents who ignored you or hurt you and you try to talk about that with them and they don't listen or they just kind of brush you off, that can feel really devastating to a child. The need for connection is so intensely strong that any kind of ostracizing or shunning or lack of acknowledgement or lack of attunement or disconnection, that means death on a primal level. As humans, we're going to prioritize connection over truth. I think if we can recognize that if we prioritize connection that's not based on truth, it's actually not even real connection. That's the thing that is sometimes hard. We might know this intellectually but still have that fear. Keeping connection over truth keeps you in survival mode. It keeps you safe in that sense of survival but it prevents real evolution and spiritual, psychological, expansion that you want to have in growing with your spouse and being truly authentic, truly transparent, and able to navigate any of the emotions that that brings up from a place of mutual respect.

- Results from lack of trust in our spouse

The other thing that fear of speaking your truth results from is lack of trust in your spouse. If there's been a history of being blamed or criticized and that hurts, you want to avoid that hurt. If you don't trust that it's safe, then you're going to be too afraid of saying something because you know from experience with your spouse, that their response is going to hurt too much. So you let your fear win. This should be resolved by the emotional connection lesson. If you're still in that process of rebuilding trust, you will start to overcome this fear based on the past. You'll start to have like the new story that guides you and the trust will be built in the new story and the emotional connection that we talked about two lessons ago.

- Creates an excuse to stay hidden

The other thing that fear of speaking the truth does is it really keeps you in a place that is the opposite of vulnerability, and you're stuck there. Just like blame, when I say the opposite of vulnerability, it's essentially something that causes you to hide yourself. You're not showing yourself to allow for a real truthful connection. It's that failure to open up and take the risk that vulnerability would require, which is the foundation of healthy communication, which we're going to get into.

RIGHTEOUS RAGE

This next disempowered mental stance is one of my favorites -- righteous rage. Righteous rage, this is something I have been guilty of:

- Vigorous attachment to the moral high-ground

It's the sense that you have moral superiority and that you have the right to be so mad because you have been so wronged. We latch on to this, like, if we feel invalidated then something comes up where it's like, *yep, see! I'm right!* Then there's this righteousness that will fuel into other destructive strategies.

- Justifies acting out behavior

But one of the dangerous things about righteous rage is that it allows us to justify acting out behavior. Terry Real calls it *offending from the victim position*. When in righteous rage, you're operating from the sense of, *I've been victimized but now I'm Triumphant and now I'm justified in offending*. When we feel righteous, we allow ourselves to be like, *I don't even care! You deserve it*. Like, *you know what, I know that I'm right, so I get to say and do whatever I want*. Like you have it coming, this is your fault. So we tell ourselves, it's just to protect ourselves or we tell ourselves that we're just standing up for ourselves. But the stance of righteous rage is a super slippery slope and it causes damage to trust and safety in the relationship, which we'll get into later.

- Form of grandiosity

The other thing to know about righteous rage, if you recognize it in yourself, is that it is a form of grandiosity, which means that it feels good. Grandiosity feels good. In righteous rage, you feel vindicated, you feel validated, you feel better than and you're standing in judgment of the other. When you're asking questions, like, *how could they? What kind of person would xyz?* And it feels good because superiority is an antidote to shame, in that externalizing way. You're externalizing shame. Now self-blame is internalizing shame but grandiosity is the externalizing of shame, in the form of one-upping people. I think righteous rage really overlaps with this a lot.

- Driven by contempt

Then finally, I want to say righteous rage is driven by contempt, which is one of the four biggest predictors of divorce and a highly damaging stance in relationships. We're going to get into this more in the strategies lesson but essentially, contempt is

the complete opposite of cherishing or loving behaviors. It's judgment. It's holding your spouse in very poor regard. It's a position of condescension and really believing that they're ridiculous or stupid or horrible. Now contempt is also actions that we take, but in this sense I'm talking about the emotion of contempt.

WEAK INTERNAL BOUNDARIES

Weak internal boundaries is the next kind of a disempowered mindset.

- Inability to resist the temptation to “spill out” onto your spouse

This essentially means that our containing boundaries, which we talked about already in the boundaries lesson, is not strong at all. We're unable to resist the temptation to spill out onto our spouse and allow unhealthy communication to cross the line between us and them. It's a failure to protect them. It's a failure to protect the relationship from our destructive expressions and that can include blame and defensiveness and all kinds of things. Any kind of really negative expression, any kind of negative toxic form of communication that we allow out of our mouth.

- Impulsiveness

In that sense, it's a form of impulsiveness. It's a quick reaction without thinking. It just comes out. It's the allowance of knee-jerk reactions. If we don't have strong containing boundaries, we're just going to spill over, which if you think about spilling, spilling is not something that takes very long. It's really fast. It happens all at once. It's not even something that you're aware of doing on purpose.

- Failure to see the hurt you may be causing

Also, weak internal boundaries are connected to the failure to see the hurt in your spouse. You're spilling out because you don't see the hurt. You don't even see them. You're just really only seeing yourself in that moment. They become just an extension of something else. You don't see that separate line of they are a separate other person. It's not because you're consciously trying to hurt them, it's just from old programs and old habits and limiting beliefs. When you're in fight or flight mode, you just don't see them. You're so in fight or flight, that all you're doing is fighting for your life in that moment. That's important to remember, too. It's not necessarily that you're intentionally trying to hurt the other person but you just can't see the hurt that you're causing.

VICTIMHOOD

And finally, one of the most common unconscious mental stances or weak mindsets or disempowered mindsets is victimhood.

- Disempowered perceptual filter

This is in the most general sense overall. It's a disempowered perceptual filter. Like I said before, that locus of control is external, as I touched on in the tendency to take a blaming stance. But victimhood is broader than blaming though. It's just the lens we have on in life. I do think it's encouraged in our culture in the larger social context that promotes this in many ways. I will say that I don't really like it when people use the word victim or victimhood to shame somebody who's speaking or hurt about something or speaking truth to oppression. I don't like it when people say, “stop being such a victim,” when they're trying to express the impact something had on them. But I do believe that we have to be really honest with ourselves. Even the most self-aware of us in the bunch are still prone to this, I should say. No one isn't totally immune to this sneaking up on us at times. If we can be honest with ourselves and if we can see, *what I might be hanging on to this a little bit too much? I might be hanging on to this victim stance a little bit too long and it no longer serves me*, and recognize that it is a human tendency to argue for the victim position, then we'll be able to move forward a little bit and get our power back.

- The need to feel or articulate how you have been wronged

But that mental stance of victimhood actually leads to this internal need to like want to articulate how you have been wronged. An example of arguing for the victim position would be like, if you're talking to your spouse and that you're saying, “no, but I was the one that was hurt. I only did that because you hurt me.” And they're like, “no, but you hurt me more.” “No, I'm the most transgressed out of the two of us and I need you to see that.” Like people will vie for the victim position.

- Relieves you of accountability or responsibility

I know I've touched on this before, but the reason for this is that there usually is some kind of subconscious secondary gain

from that, which sometimes is about this next point, which is that it relieves you of your accountability and responsibility. Let's face it, it's just simply easier. It's less work or it's more comfortable depending on how you were raised. The desire to not be responsible for the other person or to feel even accountable to the other person in our actions can usually fall in line with our own limiting beliefs because our psyche will always look to confirm that we're right. Our psyche will look for evidence to confirm our limiting beliefs even if they don't serve us anymore. That's just how we're wired.

- Seeks to meet an unmet need in childhood

Another reason why we want to stay there, I think, is that it seeks to meet an unmet need in childhood. If you truly were a victim, if you truly were hurt and you had no power, if you were abused, if you were subject to trauma, as a child you have no power over that. You truly are a victim of trauma and horrible experiences that have had a damaging impact. If this is not acknowledged or repaired or validated so that you could heal, then you are going to have the need for others to see that. You're going to want other people to see your hurt and that it wasn't your fault. Because it wasn't! And this is normal in people, we want that. But if the unmet need in childhood is carrying over into your functional adult attempts at having a relationship, and it filters over into trying to get your spouse to give you what was missing, even though now as an adult you do have the power to keep yourself safe in your life and relationship and you are responsible for your experiences and the dynamics that you engage in, if we can remember that, we'll see that the gain of what we get from that realization far outweighs any secondary gain that we would get from meeting that unmet need or having someone acknowledge, *you're right. It's on me. I can fix it.* Because on some level, we want them to fix something that can't be fixed. It's too late, it's past, now all we can do is heal and grieve and recognize the power that we have now. Now I will say that there's a caveat to this, as an adult, you do have the power to keep yourself safe in your life and your relationships. Unless, you're with an abuser or a full-blown narcissist, in which case you're probably not in this program anyways, because there's no way to have a healthy relationship with that type of person. There is no inside-out approach that works for that. You can't be in relationship with that type of person at all and have a healthy relationship. It's probably not even you at all or you wouldn't be here, but I'm just saying that as a caveat.

DAMAGING STRATEGIES

We're going to move into the damaging strategies. These internal states that come from the disempowered mindset, they lead directly into how we communicate the external expression or the approaches that we use to try to resolve something or connect or get a need met. When you're coming from the weak mindset, you're going to engage in some of these damaging strategies of communication, which are at worst highly damaging and at best, just simply ineffective. There's no judgment on any of these. It really is just a matter of what works and what doesn't work. There are eight destructive strategies, that I'm going to go over in detail. Four of these are the same as the losing strategies that were identified by Terry Real. Then there's four that I've included in here as well. I'm going to name these really quick and then we'll go into detail on each one. So, the strategies are:

1. Convincing
2. Criticism
3. Control
4. Defensive Maneuvers
5. Withdrawal
6. Contempt
7. Unbridled Self-Expression
8. Retaliation

So, let's go through these one by one.

CONVINCING

- Everything you say is geared towards getting your partner to agree with you
Convincing is really just any behavior that has as its primary goal where everything you say and do is geared towards getting your partner to agree with your point of view and see it your way. Your primary goal is to convince.
- Can be done in many ways: deconstructing the premise of their position, showing them how it doesn't make sense, repeating yourself.

This can be done in many ways. You can be arguing your point, you can be deconstructing what they're saying, taking it apart point by point, showing them their inconsistencies, showing them, "hey, this doesn't make sense. Here's why you're wrong, why it's not valid," it could be through repeating yourself. It could even be done with benign approaches like just making analogies or giving examples or explaining or teaching or showing.

- You feel unable to resolve things until you've convinced them.

But one of the biggest indications that you're in convincing mode is that you feel unable to resolve things until you have convinced them. Again, as I mentioned with the need to be right, this comes from beliefs. They have to agree, in order for you to be connected or for you to be able to work together. You might have inherited that belief. You just feel really unresolved until you can convince them and it's not true. It's just not true but it may feel that way. Sometimes you may not even be aware that this is your goal. Lots of times, I've seen this in couples and in my own relationship, where I'm not even aware that I'm in convincing mode. I'm just not winning and there's no point. I can just let go once I realize, *oh, I'm in convincing mode and that is not going to get me where I want to go*. That's why I always talk about be aware of what your intentions are in the communication, *what is my point? What am I trying to get here? What would make me feel good about this conversation? Is the only way that I can feel good about this conversation that they like see my point of view and anything else will not do? If so, then you're in convincing mode.*

CRITICISM

Criticism, now this results from a blaming mindset. This is huge. This happens all the time. Sometimes, you'll have a really hard time distinguishing criticism from complaining or feedback. Criticism is characterized by a few specific things that makes it criticism.

- Making negative assessments of their character

Criticism is when you make a negative assessment of someone's character. It's about them as a person.

- Different than complaining

It's different than complaining. It's not just a gripe about a situation or something that happened once. It's pointing to something that happened and connecting to everything else your spouse does.

- Globalizing their behavior

That's actually globalizing, which is another characteristic. It's a more specific form of this. It's *you always or you never do xyz or you are so xyz*. It's just globalizing. The one thing they did today is evidence of how they always are or it's connected to everything else that's happened in the past and it's connected to what you expect of them in the future. You could feel hopeless because they did something today that you extrapolate into the future.

- Attack on who they are as a person

In that sense, the globalizing aspect of criticism is essentially an attack on who they are as a person. It's talking about who they are, not what they did. It's about the person and not the behavior. I'm going to give you some examples, just to kind of clarify this line between complaining and criticism. A complaint would sound something, like, *the dishes are dirty and I'm disappointed you didn't unload the dishwasher* -- that's a specific complaint. That's not a criticism. A criticism is saying, *the dishes are dirty. There you go again. I can never trust you to do what you say you will or you never do what you say you will* -- that's a criticism. Another criticism would be, like, *we're late. Are you being slow on purpose?* When you attribute negative intention to somebody, that's a form of criticism. *You're so selfish or you're so fill in the blank. You're so lazy. You're so self-absorbed. You're so clueless.* That's a criticism. When you ask them, "who does that? You always tune out when I'm talking. Who does that?" Or "what kind of person does that?" That's kind of, like, that borders into contemptuous a little bit. *Why do you always ignore my requests?* It sounds like a question but really it's a criticism. So, I hope that helps. There is a worksheet that you can print out and there's a quiz that you can test your knowledge of the difference between criticism and complaining because this gets confused a lot. The main thing that draws the line is that a complaint is about one specific thing and criticism is linked with other things, whether that's about that person's behaviors or qualities or intentions, that there's a link with the past and the link with the future and how things always are.

DEFENSIVE MANEUVERS

Criticism leads to the next destructive strategy, which is defensive maneuvers. The stance of defensiveness shows up in many kinds of moves. There's many different ways that you can be defensive. There's several ways to do this that Dr. Gottman outlines in several of his books. I think they're super helpful. They've helped me a lot. They've helped my clients a lot. I'm going to go through each of these here because I think when you're able to recognize exactly when that's happening, either in yourself or in your spouse, you're able to see it, *oh, that's what's happening*. We can identify it and then we can take a step back or sidestep it or use it an opportunity for growth later on. But we won't just have like the same knee-jerk reaction to it or get pulled in before we even realize it. This is super helpful.

- Denying responsibility

This is basically the approach that you would take when you know that something isn't your fault but you're being blamed for something and so you want to deny responsibility. For example, it would be like, "I never said I would," or "I didn't do anything wrong," or "that's not my job," or "I can only do so much." It's essentially saying that whatever it is that you've been called into question for, was never your responsibility in the first place. You're sidestepping the point. You're just going right into *that's not mine*.

- Making excuses

Another way of being defensive is making excuses. This is a super common maneuver. It's just something you would do when you feel like there's a really good reason why you did something you shouldn't have done or didn't do something you're supposed to have done. For example, there was bad traffic. You would say, "I just couldn't because my boss called and it took a while," or "work was just really busy," or "the kids kept interrupting me" or *this happened* or *this happened*. Essentially, you're admitting that, "I did something that was not what was expected," or "I did something that impacted you, but whatever the case is, I'm not going to take responsibility because you're making excuses." That's what it is.

- Disagreeing with negative mind-reading

Another defensive maneuver is disagreeing with negative mind reading. This is when your partner makes unflattering or just simply incorrect assumptions about your feelings or motives. If they give you the feedback wheel and they're saying, "the meaning I give it is xyz." You feel like somehow they're attributing an ill intent, like a bad intention on your part to something that you did. Then you argue with exasperation or respond with a lack of generosity or reassurance because what you're focusing on, is the place where they are wrong. You're arguing with a premise of what they're saying they're feeling, rather than just hearing their feelings. That's what makes it defensive. Even if you're right and maybe they got it wrong about you, but you're choosing to emphasize where they're wrong, rather than trying to understand their experience of the situation. That's an openness and a curiosity and a willingness to hear, which is the opposite of defensiveness.

- Cross-complaining

Another defensive maneuver is cross-complaining. This is if your spouse does something that's just as bad as what you feel accused of. Like if they say to you, "I wish you would have done the dishes like you said you would," you'd say, "well, I wish you wouldn't leave your clothes on the floor." Whatever the case is, you're just turning the tables about a different issue.

- Rubber Man/Rubber Woman

Then there's rubber man/rubber woman. This comes from the expression: *I'm rubber, your glue. Whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you*. That essentially is turning the tables with the exact same complaint. It's still turning tables like cross-complaining but in this case, it's the same complaint. If your partner's doing the exact same thing and you feel like they don't have a leg to stand on. I'm not going to listen to them because they don't like something that I did and yet they've done it before, too. If they say, "hey, you didn't call and I worried about you." And then you would say, "well, you didn't call me either on this date," or "you never call me, how is that any different?" You can see that just ends up being like a ball lobbed back and forth. Nobody's really taking anything in and it doesn't go anywhere. It just shuts it down.

- "Yes, but..."

The next defensive maneuver is the "Yes, but..." approach. That's what you use when you know that they're right but whatever they're accusing you of, is morally justifiable. Because the reason that you had to not do the thing you were supposed to do or the reason that you had to do the thing they didn't like, you have a morally justifiable reason that outweighs the transgression that you committed. It might be, like, "yes, I know. I did not pay that bill but I was waiting for you to make the deposit." Or something along the lines of, like, "I didn't do it, you're right, but it's because of something else." The reason why that happened was actually totally justifiable so therefore you don't even have a right to bring up what you're bringing up. It's a

defensive maneuver that's destructive because it just completely deflects and blocks what the other person is saying. It's very invalidating.

- Repeating yourself

Then there's repeating yourself. This is super common. I can relate to this, too, like, you do this because you feel like if they could just hear you, they would be convinced or if they could just hear you, they would stop saying what they're saying. You're trying to protect yourself and it's not working. You just keep rephrasing your point in like 18 different ways or in a louder voice. You're not really responding to what they're saying and you're not recognizing that it's not going anywhere. Continuing to repeat yourself is blocking what's trying to be said so it's not actually going to stop being said.

- Whining

Whining, this is self-explanatory, but what's interesting about this, according to Gottman, is that you can actually do this without the sound of whining, in order to act like the victim and kind of feel sorry for yourself. It's an expression of, like, "why are you picking on me?" "Why are you doing this to me?" It's that whining attitude that's considered a defensive maneuver even if you're not actually whining with your tone.

- Body language

Another defensive maneuver is body language. This is a big thing, too, because when people feel like they're above verbal defenses, they're not even going to waste their time to deal with what you're saying. But they're still defending themselves anyway. This can happen through body language, like, keeping your arms folded across the chest, giving a false smile, shifting your body from side to side, walking away. Women tend to touch their neck when they're feeling defensive. Start doing other things while the person is talking so that you could block out what they're saying. You're not actually speaking but you're just physically showing that you're not available to hear it. That's a defensive maneuver as well.

If you see any of these in yourself or in your spouse, it's super important to identify those. Just recognize, *okay, I commit. I recognize this and I commit to no longer doing these.* Ideally, you're going to be able to call it out lovingly with your spouse and switch gears and pivot because defensiveness is such a block to emotional connection. We are safer when we put down our armor in this relational work. We are safer when we lower our defenses. It just doesn't feel that way but it really is true, that you really are safer because you're helping them to feel that you are open to them and that lowers the fighter flight reaction and that makes you safer. Just know that none of this stuff works. It just doesn't work. It just creates resentment and it's a guarantee to never get anywhere.

WITHDRAWAL

The next destructive strategy is withdrawal. This comes from the fear of speaking truth. This includes stonewalling, and like I mentioned before, it includes what we think of as a silent treatment. Stonewalling is one of those four horsemen of the apocalypse that Gottman talks about, which is essentially one of his big four predictors of divorce. Stonewalling is just that what it sounds like. Just completely blocking the other person out and completely ignoring them. Now, withdrawal can show up in a lot of different ways but it means a few different things.

- Passive-aggressive retaliation

It can be that you're just giving up. So, you're withdrawing as a passive-aggressive way to retaliate. That can be why you're withdrawing.

- Signal that you don't wish to invest any more energy

It can be a signal that you don't want to invest any further energy in the conversation or dynamics or the relationship even. It is interpreted as a lack of care for the relationship. It could be because you feel defeated or hopeless, because it hasn't worked before, because you haven't had the tools yet.

- Sign of being flooded or overwhelmed

It can be a sign of being flooded or overwhelmed. When you're in fight or flight and you don't know how to respond in a healthy way, you withdraw just to be on the safe side. It's not like you have ill intentions by withdrawal, it's not a retaliatory move, but it's just a survival move. You don't know what else to do and you're afraid of how you will react if you don't withdraw.

- Extremely painful for the recipient

The thing to remember is that withdrawal is extremely painful for your partner. If you withdraw, it's painful for the recipient of withdrawal. I think, it's also painful for the person who is withdrawing but for the person who's on the receiving end of withdrawal, it really triggers abandonment fears and primal panic, which is why you may withdraw on purpose if it's retaliation because you know it will hurt them. It might be an unintended consequence, but either way, it really creates a lot of hurt and fear and makes it impossible for differences to be resolved. Nobody likes to be shut out. In fact, it's often way more damaging to respond to your partner by shutting them out than by staying in contact with your partner and sharing your anger or upset, as long as you're not being abusive. It's actually way better to express that you're upset with them and face them than it is to withdraw.

There are healthy ways to withdraw -- there's a time out or responsible distance taking, and we'll talk about that more in lesson seven, but for now, if you feel the need to withdraw from your partner, just let them know what you're doing. Make an agreement ahead of time, like, *if I withdraw, it's going to be under these conditions. It will be for these reasons and we agree to that*, maybe even agree to check back in after two hours or something to reconnect and discuss things further. If you do that, you're promoting safety and trust and good will in your relationship even if you have to withdraw.

CONTEMPT

This also comes from righteous rage. It comes from blame as well. This is defined by Gottman as contemptuous behaviors. Contempt is way beyond criticism. It's usually fueled by long-simmering, negative thoughts about your partner. It's an expression of superiority, in the form of an attack on their sense of self. I think of it as one-upping somebody all the time, behaviors that are one-upping.

Some examples of this might be:

- Hostile Humor including sarcasm

- Insults and name-calling

I'm talking about like verbal abuse but also like just hitting below the belt and almost like the verbal equivalent of spitting on somebody, that really hateful words, hateful actions.

- Regular interruption

Like talking over them on purpose to not let them talk or to talk over them just to aggravate them or to like imitate them or repeat everything that they say just to get a rise out of them.

- Body language (For example: eye-rolling, mockery, dismissive gestures etc.)

For example: eye rolling or mockery. Like if you imitate their facial expressions or you imitate what they did or how they said it, smirking at them, laughing at them with disdain or dismissive gestures, like, waving someone away with your hand.

- Regular impatience

I think, we forget that contempt can show up through regular and like pervasive impatience, which is like constantly expressing irritation or disgust how long somebody's taking or how they're doing something. It's essentially shaming them for how they operate in the world. Any words or actions or sarcastic comments that have that impact, that's considered contempt.

- Ignoring their repeated requests for affection or appreciation

Finally ignoring your spouse's repeated request for affection or appreciation is a form of contempt. I don't mean this in the unconscious way, where some spouses ignore needs. Sometimes spouses are not going to be able to meet their spouse's needs maybe because they're working on boundaries. Maybe because they're struggling with something else. Maybe because they're really just clueless in the moment or they're not aware their adaptive child has taken over. I'm not talking about ignoring needs in that way. I'm talking more about, if you ignore the needs of your spouse from a conscious place of withholding, when you are feeling repulsed or disgusted or just from a place of really holding your spouse in highly negative regard.

I want to mention that contempt comes from grandiosity. It's the externalization of shame. It can come from that or contempt can come from really just accumulated resentments or built up anger or accumulated hurts, where you start to view your spouse as the enemy over time or you view your spouse as the aggressor because they have hurt you a lot over time. Your narrative

narrative has become so entrenched that you lose all positive regard for your spouse. Either that, like, you can come from a place of grandiosity and that's the role you play most of the time in the relationship, or you can reach contempt from a place of being one down. Being the one down in your relationship can eventually lead to self-righteousness and contempt, when you finally get to the place of like, *no more, I will not accept this anymore*. But either way, it's very corrosive. It's very toxic and damaging. You got to know the difference between contempt and criticism and complaining. Again, go back to that PDF in this lesson, which is going to help you get really clear and mindful about your strategy. So that you can pivot in more healthy ways in the future to recognize when you or your spouse is engaging in contempt.

UNBRIDLED SELF-EXPRESSION

Another destructive approach to communication that also comes from righteous rage is unbridled self-expression.

- Free-for-all coming from belief that we must share every thought and feeling
This is basically a free-for-all of expression, that's predicated on this idea that we have to communicate all of our thoughts and feelings with our partner because sharing always creates closeness. We believe every thought and feeling has to be expressed. We think that it's just being honest. But it's essentially emotional dumping, in the name of honesty.
- Unfiltered and boundaryless communication
Another way of putting it is, it's unfiltered and boundary-less, so as opposed to sharing and owning your interpretations and owning your emotions, unbridled self-expression is usually more of a blaming stance energized by a lack of containing boundaries. You're just dumping onto them and not recognizing the line between you and them.
- Usually negative (laundry list, "how could you," or You-statements)
It's usually negative. It shows up as a venting session, like a laundry list, like, *how could you?* Just lots of you-statements and how could you's and criticism and complaining. It's just a lot at once. Even if you feel like you're saying things in the right way, if it's just a ton of things at one time, that's even considered unbridled self-expression. You have to check yourself because you might be thinking, *hey, I'm just keeping it real or they had it coming or they need to hear the truth or I'm just rocking the boat*, beware of that. I always recommend rocking the boat, like that's definitely something we want to do when we're disrupting the pattern and shaking things up. But unbridled self-expression is not the way.
- Can come from good intentions
I also want to mention that unbridled self-expression can come from good intentions. Again, like some of these things can, it could be just all that you know how to do. It's really just coming from a place of wanting to feel heard and wanting to get closer. It can also come from the intention to make them feel as bad as you do or to retaliate. It can come from a lack of care about how they feel because you believe they deserve it, like, offending from the victim position. Either way, it doesn't work. Either way, it's going to lower the chances that you're going to be heard, if you think about it. Your spouse is going to start to become desensitized to your expressions of emotion. If this is something you do frequently, they're going to become desensitized. They're going to block you out because it's so unconstructive. Unbridled self-expression is the kind of expression that you can't do anything with. It's not constructive. It's nothing they can do something with. It's really just the only choice is just to be available for a bunch of negative energy with nothing constructive that can be done about it. People, just without even recognizing that, will just kind of shut down around it or start blocking it out.

RETALIATION

Our final damaging strategy is retaliation. I would say the disempowered mindset of victimhood almost always leads to behaviors of retaliation, which is about getting even, on its most basic level, it's about revenge.

- A natural human impulse
It's a natural human impulse. When we feel hurt we want to reflexively hurt back. That's what children do. We want to hurt them back. When we feel hurt, we want them to feel hurt. That's just human. But we want to be really careful because that's the adaptive child. That's just another way of offending from the victim position. Everybody who does this, feels they've been wronged. Most harm is done in retaliation. It's done in the name of, *I'm just evening the score*.
- It can be direct or indirect

The thing to notice is that retaliation can be direct or it can be indirect. If it's direct, it can be really clear, like you could say to yourselves like, "you think I'm mean? Well everyone thinks you're mean. The only reason people like you is because of x y z," and then you really hurt their feelings because they said something about you, double down. An indirect would be more expressed as like passive aggressive behavior, withdrawal of affection, removing eye contact, ignoring, getting back at them in some indirect way while not owning that that's what's actually going on with you.

- Fueled by victim-thinking

Retaliation is fueled by victim thinking because the thought process is, *why should I do this for them? Why should I be the bigger person when they don't do that for me? Or I'm going to give them a taste of their own medicine. Or I'm not going to let them get away with that.* You need to make them pay for what they did because of the victim thinking. When you start to notice that that's where your brain is going, you are at high risk of retaliation. You have the opportunity, when you notice those thoughts, to catch yourself and not act out on that.

- Can be anything (hurtful comments, withdrawal of love, sarcasm)

Retaliation can be anything. It can be hurtful comments. It can be withdrawal of love. It can be sarcasm. It can be silent treatment. It can really be anything that you know is going to hurt them so that's why I'm not even getting into all the specifics here because something that wouldn't hurt somebody else might really hurt your spouse. You know your spouse best, right? So you probably know ways that you could retaliate with them, if that's your thing.

- Comes from hurt and a deep desire to connect

The irony is, or the paradox I should say is, that often retaliation comes from an underlying hurt and a deep desire to connect. The hurt wouldn't be there, if you think about it. If there wasn't a desire for connection, it means that there's a stake in the game. It means that you care. It means that you want something from them. That's a good sign, as opposed to being so checked out that you don't care enough, because it's not worth your energy. It's just that it's misdirected. It's not healthy and it just doesn't work.

So, that is that! Those are the eight very destructive strategies that most people use or default to. You may recognize yourself in many of these. The purpose of this lesson really is to just identify what these are for you, get really clear on these, and then move into lesson seven, where we're going to talk about what you can do instead. But I wanted to first just really call out what are the default modes that people go to, what are the things that are identifiable, mindsets, thought, patterns, and strategies that we can point to, identify and remove from our dynamic. It's sort of like when we want to have a healthy diet. We can eat really healthy things but we also have to know what foods to avoid. We have to also eliminate toxins from our diet, if we're going on a cleanse or if we're trying to get healthy. We can say, "I'm going to eat tons of vegetables," but if we're also eating a bunch of crap, that's really going to dumb down the effect of the healthy food that we're eating. Usually, whenever we're trying to restore our health, I'm just using this as an example, as an analogy, we'd find out what should we stop doing first. Let's remove that and simultaneously or just immediately afterwards, you move into what are the alternatives. You have to have alternatives, and I'm going to share those with you. But if first, if you could just connect with your commitment to really eliminating these behaviors and these ways of thinking from your relationship, from your mind. Part one, where we're talking about the pitfalls of communication, that's really more of a mindset thing and checking your thought patterns and your ways of thinking, which if you're journaling regularly, you're going to catch yourself. Then to identify what your strategies are that you tend to default to. I know that we touched on this, I think in lesson two, where I asked you to think about what are your losing strategies. Hopefully, this fleshed it out a little bit more and gave you a little bit richer picture of all of the different destructive strategies that we will engage in and really separating the actions from the ways of thinking that contribute to those actions.

Exercises for Lesson 6: Communication Pitfalls

1. Self-Test on Criticism
2. Criticism, Contempt, or Complaining Quiz
3. List of Common Defensive Maneuvers

What I want you guys to do for this lesson is to:

Do a self-criticism test. You're going to get a sense of like where do you fall on that scale of criticism. A lot of people think they're not critical but they really are. Then there's another quiz that's on Criticism, Contempt and Complaining, where you have to kind of guess if the statement that is written is a criticism or if it's a contemptuous statement or if it's a complaint and testing your knowledge on the difference with that. Then there's a List of the Common Defensive Maneuvers, that I want you to be aware of. So that you can notice those and sidestep those if your spouse engages those or if they employ those maneuvers, you are able to

sidestep. You are able to recognize that and say, "I'm not going to get baited by that and I'm going to call it out and we can talk about it later."

Also, that's not written on here obviously, go through what you just wrote down and the notes that you incorporated here. The notes that you took from this lesson, where you were identifying with these things, this can be used in your journal to look at, *all right, where do I hold these thought patterns? Where do I have, for example, a victim mindset. Where do I have, for example, these beliefs that I have to be right in order to be okay?* Then you can take those notes and use those to build your beliefs to support eliminating these things. If those beliefs are still in place, even if you commit to not doing these destructive strategies, you're still going to. As soon as you go into fight or flight, you're going to still engage in those strategies. That's because you cannot act greater than what your beliefs will support for the long term. So don't forget to recondition your beliefs and your mindset to support the changes that you're committing to this lesson.

Then, lesson seven is going to be all about what you can do instead. It's going to be the master healthy communication toolkit. I'm really excited for you guys to have that. That's kind of what we've been waiting for, all the tabling. Now, you're going to be able to use what's in the next lesson to be able to address some of these long-standing, hot button issues. Thanks for tuning in and I will see you in the next lesson!