

The Couples Cure

Miraculous Recovery for Couples on the Brink

Phase III: Receiving and The Art of Acceptance

Lesson 8: Get Out of Your Way

Separating Emotions from Thoughts

Hey guys! I just wanted to pop in here to the Couple's Cure Facebook group to talk about the really important topic of separating emotions from thoughts. This is something that I have talked about in the group coaching calls. I've recommended that when we're stuck in interpreting and meaning making that is not helpful to what our goals are. I get a lot of questions about what this really means and what that looks like. I had promised that I would pop in here and go into this a little bit more in detail. Just wanted to thank Adam for remembering to bring it up and Diana for remembering the topic at hand and what it was that the exact questions were. This is something that is not as easy to do as it sounds like it would be.

This idea of separating our thoughts from emotions is a really pivotal part of the work that we do because we are doing belief work. In order to do belief work and change our beliefs, we have to be able to recognize what those thoughts are that we're having, those automatic negative thoughts. Capture them and literally change them or reprogram those beliefs. A common barrier that comes up in this is the emotions that we feel are separate from that but they get conflated a lot. So, we will end up feeding, like our emotions with negative thinking and meaning making that will only perpetuate those emotions, that just make us feel lousy and make it a lot harder to do the work at hand with this relationship journey that we're on. Then, on the other hand, the emotions will confuse our thoughts. We'll think that, because we're feeling a certain way, that something is true, right? If I'm feeling rejected or I'm feeling really low, actually, to feel rejected is technically an interpretation, the emotion would be hurt, separation. When we have these really strong emotions, what tends to happen is that we automatically think that it means something and then we ruminate on that. We stay stuck in that. The solution is, if we can separate the emotions from the thoughts, we can actually let the emotions come. We can sit with our emotions. We don't have to worry that we're inadvertently reinforcing those emotions.

A lot of times, people think "Well, this belief work means I have to feel good all the time. I have to think positive all the time. Therefore, if I'm having a bad day or if I'm having a negative emotion, I'm sabotaging this work. I'm no longer able to do the belief work if I'm feeling bad inside." That's actually not true. We can't just like plaster our negative emotions with thoughts on top of it. We can't ignore our emotions and just try to think our way out of what we're feeling. I mean we can, we can actually think our way out of our feeling, but we have to do it one step at a time. It's not something that we can do all at once. Sometimes, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to not feel bad. *How to have these emotions where I'm not staying stuck in negative thinking? How do I have my emotions without derailing the progress that I'm making, in terms of my gratitude work or my brag book work?* This is really important to get this distinction. I'm going to be using feelings and emotions interchangeably. We want to be able to have our emotions and our feelings without reinforcing them with negative interpretation or meaning making. That's where we stay stuck. That's the part that we can reprogram. We don't have to reprogram any emotions that we're having.

Now, this is a really common conflation. I'll hear people say, especially when I'm teaching the I statement, people will say things like "Well, I just really feel rejected or disregarded or disrespected." That's actually an interpretation. That's a thought. You believe that you were disrespected. What is the emotion underneath that? That's getting really picky. But this is key. I want you guys to be picky. I want you guys to really be thinking about this. I'm going to get into the like what the emotion words are and that you really should be limiting that to these words. I'm going to share that some of them in this video and also in the comments below. I'll actually type in the words and you want to stick with those. But this idea that they get really conflated is it's ingrained in a really early age because when we're little, before we can even think, we have these emotions. Then we sort of interpret that as about us. This is why children feel responsible for their parents divorce even though it can't be that or will internalize something as like "If I'm not getting the attention and love that I should be getting as a three-year-old, that becomes about like 'I guess I must not be worthy of that love and attention that I should be getting.'" That's an example of how an emotion of disconnect or that loneliness or that sadness then becomes completely equated in the mind at the subconscious level with lack

of worthiness. That's really a belief. That's a cognitive thing, not an emotional thing.

Our thoughts come from the frontal lobe of our brain, the cerebral cortex. That's where our thinking comes. That's the part that we can control. That's the part that we should be trying to control. The emotions come from the limbic system. That's the stuff that we want to welcome. Welcome it but we can actually move through it by having the emotions, if we don't stay stuck with the negative meaning making. That's why this is so important. The simplest solution for being able to do this, because it's not easy to do, is to tune into your body. The biggest difference between our thoughts and our emotions is the difference between our mind and our body. Now of course, these are connected to some degree. But when you start to have really distressing emotions that you're worried are kind of getting in the way of this relationship work and the belief change work and the action steps you're supposed to be taking, take a moment and just say "Okay, I'm going to welcome my emotions. I'm going to welcome how I'm feeling. What is it that I'm feeling? Where am I feeling it in my body? Is it in my chest? Is it in my shoulders? Is it in my limbs? Do my limbs feel heavy? Do I feel it in my gut?" That's what you want to be tuning into is the physical sensation of what an emotion is. When you do this, like if you have anger, let's say you're starting with anger, you tune into that anger. You go into your body, and especially if you're tapping, you might find that that anger morphs into something else. Like sadness or fear or grief. The tears will come. That's good. You want anger. Anger's a secondary emotion. If you do have a lot of anger, you want to be able to tune into what's underneath that. Tuning into your body will help you do that. So that's the biggest thing. If you find yourself like feeling super disappointed but your mind goes to "Oh well, if they don't think I'm worth the time," or "if they're disrespecting me," "how could they be so disrespectful?" If you notice your thoughts, that's when you want to say stop to the thoughts. "There's a thought, I release that thought." Go back into the emotion of it. "What am I actually feeling about that?" Not what does it mean and what am I thinking about it.

I think I've made that clear. I don't know how else to say that. I think that when you actually do this work, you'll find that there's a couple of clues that will tip you off to know. You're going to not do this perfectly the first few times. It's just like meditation. Your mind will wander and you have to let the thoughts go and go back to the breathing as soon as you're aware of it. With this work, you're going to want to just do that. You're going to want to, as soon as you're aware of, "Oh, that's a thought," release it and say, "Oh, there's my automatic negative thinking. I'm going to let that go," or "That's the meaning I made out of it. That might not be true. Let's go back to the emotion and just feeling the emotion."

Here's some example of emotion words that you can feel in your body - Happy; Afraid; Angry; Anxious; Nervous, which is kind of the same thing. Joyful; Upset; Sad; Depressed; Guilty; Shame; Hopeless; Lonely; Helpless; Embarrassed; Regretful; Resentful, things like that would be examples of emotions that you can just feel. When you start to then notice your thoughts, like I said, just let it go. The difference between a thought and an emotion would be something like, "I'm so hurt," or "I'm feeling so powerless about the fact that I haven't heard from him," or "He said this thing to me. I feel so xyz." Then, a thought might be something like "When is this ever going to end?" "I don't think I can do this anymore," "How could this be still happening? What a jerk!" Those are examples of thoughts, not emotions. As soon as you become aware of them, you let them go and go back to the emotion.

Things that can help if you're struggling with this are that you can have a mantra, a positive mantra, to replace the automatic negative thinking. If you're equating disappointment with rejection, for example, that's come up in this group before. You notice your thoughts are going to rejection meaning making. You feel that that's happening a lot in this work, then you need to replace it. You need to literally have a crafted positive belief statement or mantra that you can use when you're doing this emotion based work. When you're deciding to welcome in the emotions and feel the grief or feel the frustration or whatever it is that you want to feel, have your mantra ready. Then, when you have difficulty accessing the emotion because you're going into thinking, then you can say to yourself, "I'm feeling so x," "I'm feeling so sad but..," and then you replace it with a mantra "every day I'm getting stronger," or "I am deeply loved," or whatever it is that you need to feel better about this. Have it at the ready to replace it, the negative thoughts that could come in. "Even though I feel so x, I must remember this," or "I do remember this," and that's the mantra.

Another thing that can really help is EFT tapping, emotional freedom technique. You can look up Youtube videos to help you with this, if you haven't done it already. Those of you that are familiar, you know how powerful this is. When you're tapping on the meridian points, you are tuning into the emotion. It's hard at first because you're concentrating on where you're tapping more than you're thinking about the actual motion, but just do it a few times. Practice a few times and pretty soon, you are just tuning into that emotion. Letting it change, like anger might turn into sadness, sadness might turn into grief, powerlessness might turn into grief, whatever it is, allow it to morph as you tap through it because when you feel something purely, you allow it to transmute. You allow it to pass through other emotions as it releases from you. Sort of like a wave crashing on the beach, I've used that metaphor before. It builds, you feel it. It crashes and then it dissipates. It will not dissipate if you're feeding it with

negative thoughts. You will stay stuck there. So EFT tapping can really help you get through that.

Then, the final thing I want to recommend, if you're having trouble with this work, and this should be happening anyway and as part of your journaling is, you can keep a thought record. A thought record is when you just really notice what your thoughts are. Notice when you're having selective focus on the negative as opposed to selective focus on the positive. You're doing that already when you are doing your journaling work or when you're doing your brag book and you're taking the time to use your mental focus to focus on what you're grateful, for what's going well. You can capture all the time throughout the day that you notice yourself ruminating on something, having a worry, what are you actually thinking when you're worrying. Anxiety is a big one where they get conflated. When you're having anxiety, what are your thoughts? Write them down as much as you can because then you develop that awareness and you develop that muscle in your brain that allows you to recognize it the second it happens. So that when you're actually doing the tuning into the emotions and consciously trying to separate them, you'll notice it before five minutes has passed. You're going down that rabbit hole.

Those are the three things: Mantra, having that at the ready, thought records and EFT tapping can help you a lot and then remembering the body and tuning into your body. You can also, lots of you guys, have different modalities that you're working with mind, body work whether that be breathing exercises, whether that be yoga, whether that be running or some kind of physical activity that will ground you in your body will help you access those emotions. If you're really tightly wound and you're not exercising, please exercise. Please do something where you can use your body and sort of dislodge the emotion that's like in your body. Then you can feel it. Some of you guys might not even be fully feeling it and then you're not even able to do the separation work. So definitely move into your body. Try to be aware of that as much as you possibly can. If you guys have any questions whatsoever, like I said, I'm going to be adding the emotion words in the comments below. But please ask your questions in the comments below. If you have a question about it, likely somebody else does, too. Then I can answer them in the group where everybody can benefit and learn from that. If you have really great examples of having done this successfully, please share. You can even do your own video. You could do a live video and put it in here. If you want to just record yourself or just type it in. Let us know if you've had a successful experience separating your thoughts from your emotions so that we can all learn from each other and raise each other up in this work.

Okay, you guys! Thanks a lot. I will catch you in the group on Thursday. Talk to you soon!