



# The Couples Place

Lessons From Failed Relationships  
by Naomi Berger, LMFT ~ (©2012 All Rights Reserved)



## Lessons From Failed Relationships

As the saying goes “hindsight is 20/20.” Sometimes we need to fail in order to wake up and become conscious of our choices and reactions. It is the pain we suffer when things do not work out the way we hoped that often is the stimulus to look inward, learn lessons and make meaningful changes. How often have you heard someone lament, “If I could only do it over again, I would do everything differently.”

A common reaction when one experiences unhappiness in their relationship, is to point a blaming finger towards the partner. The rational often, is that it must be the partner’s fault, his/her short comings that cause me to feel frustrated, lonely, disappointed. It is because of my partner’s inability or unwillingness to listen and give me what I “am asking for” that my needs or wants are not met. The logical solution therefore, and the only chance for me to get the love I want, must be to leave, divorce, and look to meet another person who will be more sensitive, more in-tune, and responsive to me, someone else who will give me “what I need and want.”

The truth, I believe however, is revealed in the cliché “it takes two to tango.” We “taste” the “soup that we cook” together, each of us contributes our individual “favorite spices.” The challenge is to coordinate what we put in our “relational soup” in order to achieve the taste we both like.

So, have you ever asked yourself “how did it happen that the partner I was attracted to, that I committed to spend the rest of my life with, have children with, fulfill my dreams with, became my enemy, the cause of my misery?” “What did I do to have this happen to me?”



Are you ready to look at your other three fingers that point toward yourself and acknowledge your own relational mistakes, what you did wrong? If so, here are questions to ask yourself that identify common relational mistakes that potentially – and with time – can lead to separation/divorce.

## Affection And Affirmation

**1.** How conscious and intentional have you been to give your partner plenty of affirmation and support, shower your partner with affection, hold his/her hand, say I love you? Ask yourself how often do you go out of your way to make your partner feel good about him/herself? Do you express curiosity and interest about your partner’s ideas, their thoughts, and their interests? How often do you remember to point out to your partner that having them in your life enriched your life, made it more interesting?

Withholding emotional affection, ignoring dismissing each other, results in loss of emotional trust. This gives birth to the conviction that “my partner does not want to give me the love I want, I need to look elsewhere.”

## Attitude Toward Money

2. Have you thought about your attitude toward money? How are you communicating and interacting with your partner about finances? What are your attitudes about spending, saving, setting financial goals? As you assess your relationship dynamic concerning this subject notice whether you tend to discuss financial ideas, dreams concerns or do you avoid it? Are you willing to share your financial resources or insist on maintaining individual accounts? Have you engaged your partner in setting financial goals and expectations for the relationship? Do you exercise control over financial matters insisting that your partner surrender his/her ideas or needs and agree to your financial ideas or plans?

Lack of a joint relational financial mission is often a cause for loss of trust and affection leading many couples into a perpetual power struggle that fosters resentments and leads to divorce.

## Past Relationships

3. Were you in a marriage or long term committed relationship that ended up in divorce? Are you involved with a partner who has had a history of being divorced? How do you relate to your emotional past and or your partner's emotional past? Are you jealous of his/her ex? His/her relationship with children from previous relationship? Are you angry or frustrated about your partner's financial obligation to an ex partner? What about your feelings about your own past relationships? Do you keep grudges for being hurt in the past? Are you suspicious or feeling a lack of trust of your present partner because of past betrayals? Do you find yourself holding on to a past relationship? Missing or idealizing or hating an ex? Are you engaged in comparisons of present partner to an ex partner? How are you relating to your partner's extended family? Your in-laws? Do you carry unresolved issues from your relationships with your own parents projecting them to your in-laws?

Not resolving and letting go of past wounding and disappointments leads to projecting and acting out old roles in one's present relationship often making it impossible to develop true intimacy with a new partner.



## It Is My Partner's Fault

4. Are you a person who points a blaming finger at yourself or your partner when you feel frustrated or unhappy in your relationship? Do you engage in self-pity? Do you feel controlled by your partner? Do you argue, become defensive, when your partner points out a behavior that troubles them? Do you like to win an argument? Do you engage in tit-for-tat responses to avoid saying "I am sorry?" Do you constantly look for excuses, attempting to explain away, justify, your own hurtful or unacceptable behaviors?

We seem to have a need to find blame as a way of explaining our painful experience. It is challenging to face the truth about our part of the problem and to assume responsibility for making behavioral changes. It can be painful to recognize that some of our reactions in fact block us from getting the love we want. Finding who is at fault has the illusion of a possible cure, or at least providing a target for our anger and frustration. By focusing on making our partner feel bad, we attempt to manipulate the partner to respond to our liking while avoiding acknowledging our part in the relational dynamic.

The longer we hold on to anger, the less likely we are to move on and to establish healthy relationships and to learn how to resolve conflicts positively. It is not about right or wrong, winning or losing, but rather it is

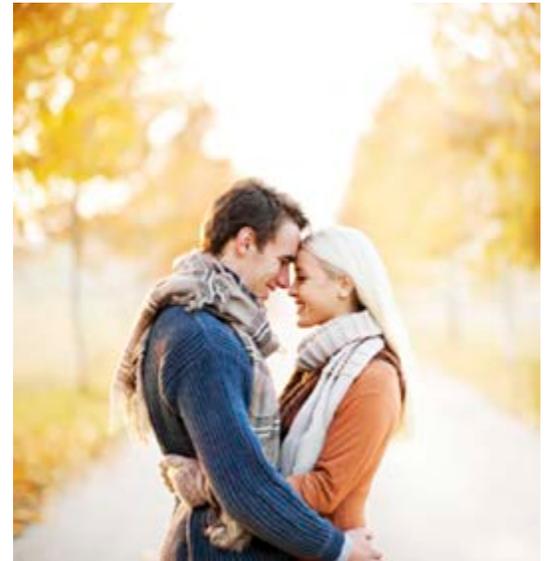
about establishing an intimate relationship where we each assume responsibility for what happens in the space between us. Being able to hear, validate, and empathize with each other's perspective goes a long way toward relational resolution of conflicts and sharing true intimacy with our partner.

## Communication

**5.** How do you communicate your deep feelings and thoughts with your partner? Do you share what is on your mind and heart honestly? Are you holding back because you are concerned about your partner's reaction? Do you prefer to engage close friends and family members in intimate communication instead of turning to your partner? Do you speak the truth, when you are angry using "I" language? Or do you point a blaming finger making your partner feel bad? Do you say "I am sorry" when you make a mistake or when you hurt your partner? Do you give your partner the cold shoulder punishing them, or not speaking to them when you feel hurt or disappointed? Do you use threats, intimidations, and insults to get what you want? Do you negotiate, compromise, and express curiosity about your partner's position/feelings? Or do you try to win, to be right?

Intimate communication is a basis for healthy and happy relationship. Lack of communication is a common symptom of an unhappy relationship. Couples lament at not being heard or noticed by their partner, they say that the partner does not "get" them, he/she is pre-occupied, not present. They engage in power struggles, defending positions rather than listening, attempting to win an argument rather than listening and staying curious and invested in understanding the partner's point of view. Individuals use communication to control, or intimidate, their partner as a way of manipulating the relationship to go their way.

Healthy couples engage in active listening, validating and emphasizing, they express curiosity about the other and are open to share their intimate feelings and thoughts. They understand that a positive resolution of an argument, or conflict, is not my way or your way but the third way where the relationship wins. It is when each partner understands that it is "changing me that changes we."



## Creating A Happy Relationship

**6.** Relational happiness and satisfaction is not the result of a intervening higher power intervention. It does not "just happen." Rather it is a result of a conscious and intentional commitment to continue working on deepening the emotional and physical intimacies that are shared, developing relational goals and supporting each other's personal growth. It is based on the understanding that we are all a work in progress. We each bring unresolved issues to our relationship and need each other to help heal those issues. Happy couples stay curious about each other's intimate feelings and thoughts, interested in learning about their partner's experiences and are willing to stretch to put themselves in his/her shoes. They understand that truth has more than one side and that a positive conflict resolution is one in which the relationship is the winner.

Do not wait for divorce before you ask yourself the question: "what am I doing wrong?" "What is my part in causing my unhappiness?" "What am I willing to do to make a difference." Be open and ready to stretch from a 'me' orientation to a 'we' orientation and you will enjoy the relationship of your dreams.