

DISTANCING

When hurt and feelings of rejection drag on month after month and year after year in a marriage it's hard to hold on. You just want relief. The problems can result from a lot of sources including, stress and trauma, illness, satanic assault, sin, false expectation and power choices in earlier years. This much is certain whatever the source of problem in the marriage one can end up feeling empty and hopeless. When you don't feel respect, or you don't feel emotionally close to your spouse its easy to begin to *distance* yourself from the other spouse. It's almost an automatic response. Distancing can begin small and end up monumental and disastrous. Here are some ways partners can distance:

- ignoring our partner
- putting our spouse down
- staying overly busy
- tuning your partner out (not listening)
- ignoring important things they say (hearing but dismissing)
- little or no communication

To avoid distancing in your marriage it is helpful to evaluate the way you handle conflict resolution. John Gottman, an expert on marriage, has identified 4 destructive patterns in the way folks resolve conflict.

1. CRITICISM

In its negative form criticism is simply pointing out faults and shortcomings. When you find yourself blame shifting toward negative criticism of your spouse you may be caught in a criticism cycle. The cycle finds one or both spouses becoming more intense and more personal in their criticism of the other spouse. Criticism *focuses on who you are*

rather than what you do. It alleges universal statements of criticism that can hardly be based in reality, for example, “you always and you never...”

2. CONTEMPT

Contempt is a lack of respect accompanied by a feeling of intense dislike. What can contempt lead to? In short, contempt can lead to very bad behavior, which often involves old-fashioned mud slinging, insulting, and name-calling. It’s a deliberate attempt to hurt your spouse. The hurt is psychological and emotional. Examples include:

- You’re stupid
- You’re just an idiot
- I cant believe you would wear that outfit.

In a passive form contempt can reside hidden in our hearts and minds as a deep, secretive resentment.

3. DEFENSIVENESS

The natural response to attack is defense. And defensiveness seems so much like the right thing to do at the time. What could seem more timely and appropriate than to protect ourselves from a perceived attack that we do not feel is true or that we know not to be true? Defensiveness is a technique we use to bolster our ego as well as our side of the argument or debate. When defensiveness is in hyper drive, no one hears anything. It’s just one accusation and defense and rebuttal followed by another.

4. STONEWALLING

Stonewalling is simply a refusal to answer or cooperate with. When stonewalling occurs anger is solidifying into bitterness and major problems are not far down the road. Sometimes stonewalling comes out of fear rather than anger. Fear that no matter what I

say it will be misconstrued and turned against me and I'll end up being hurt again. Many times at this point one partner has given up and is not working on the relationship. Gottman estimates that 85% of stonewallers are men.

Where do you stand on criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling?